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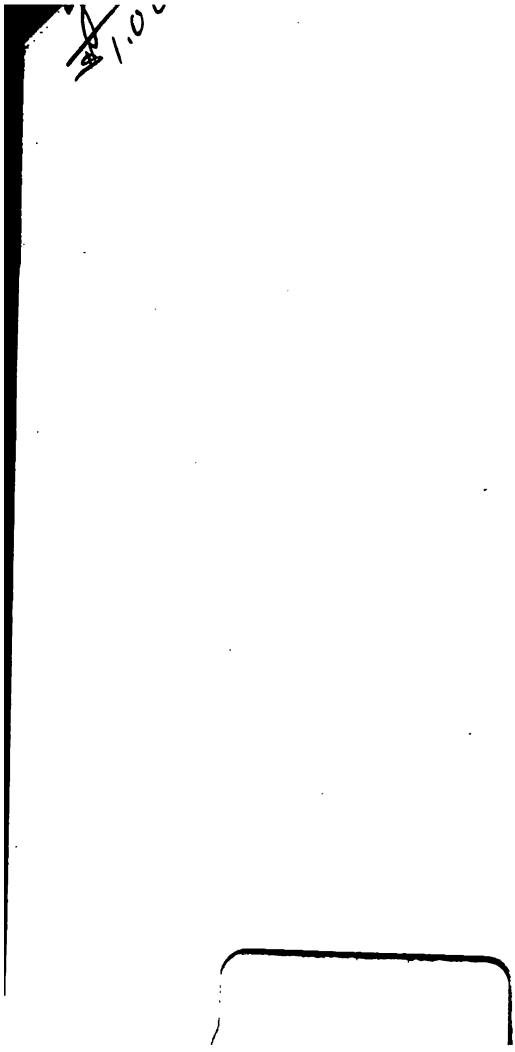

MAY 27 1924

Mrs. John E. Curran

CURRAN
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MISS FRANCES MERLEY.

A NOVEL.

By JOHN ELLIOTT CURRAN.

BOSTON:
CUPPLES AND HURD.
1888.

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What is excellent,
As God lives, is permanent;
Hearts are dust, hearts' loves remain;
Hearts' love will meet thee again.
Revere the Maker; fetch thine eye
Up to his style, and manners of the sky.
Not of adamant and gold
Built he heaven stark and cold;
No, but a nest of bending reeds,
Flowering grass, and scented weeds;
. . . . . .
Built of tears and sacred flames;
. . . . . .
Built of furtherance and pursuing,
Not of spent deeds, but of doing.

EMERSON.

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MISS FRANCES MERLEY.

CHAPTER I.

STOCKS AND BONDS.

IT was a clear, sharp night, late in November, with the moon, nearly full, half-way up the sky, when a carriage, drawn by a spanking team of horses, whirled away from the railroad station at Marshton up toward the village; for the railroad, when it came, had been respectful enough to the old village to wind around it, as it were with a sweeping bow, hat in hand, rather than plough through it and disturb its ancient peace; — such deference might have been imagined; but the fact was, that the grades favored the circuitous route, and that Marshton was not much of a place for a railroad to go to.

The only occupant of the interior of the carriage was a young woman of eighteen, Frances Merley. She leaned back in a listless fashion, watching the roadside objects as they flitted by, yet not more than half thinking of them. The ring of the horses' hoofs on the frozen macadam-road came strong and clear to her

ears; and the liquid sheen of the moon, and the brightness of the stars farther down the sky were certainly worthy of being seen; yet her senses were only half alive to these things. She noted, indeed, with some surprise, the curious change that a leafless season of the year had wrought in the roadsides, which she had seen before only in their summer dress. Where a thicket of wild roses and blackberry bushes had always been, — a secure resort for little chirping birds, who alone knew the dark recesses beneath the spread of leaves, — only a few naked brambles now grew, disclosing a rough stone-wall that she had never seen before. At another spot the stillness seemed preternatural, where she had always heard the grunt and piping of frogs from some pools in the pasture. And just on the edge of the village, a field, which, as she remembered it, had always been enlivened by the shouts and figures of boys playing ball, seemed as if it had been visited by some destroying spirit, so silent was it now in its desertion.

Still, even the strangeness of these changes did not fully arouse her. An undercurrent of thought was really occupying her mind, — a reflection upon her position and a dull expectation of the meeting that was only a few minutes off.

In the village, however, the sound of the church clock striking seven seemed to bring her to herself; and when the carriage, dashing on into the outskirts again, turned into a long driveway and rolled up at

last before a wide-open front door, with the lamplight flashing down the steps, she was looking out, with a little heat of excitement in her face.

A somewhat tremulous old lady — if a person of fifty can be called old — was standing in the doorway, with evidences of welcome in her face and manner, but too diffident to make any decided expression of hospitality. But when Frances, running up the steps from the carriage, gave her an affectionate hug, she accepted it with tearful pleasure, and tremblingly embraced the young traveller in return.

"I am so glad you are here," she said, as Frances released her; "I think the train must have been late, and I was afraid that something had happened; but Luther said no, that you would be here all right."

"And I am glad to see you, Aunt Miranda," said her niece, as she gently but roguishly pinched Miranda's cheeks so as to make her mouth pucker.

Her gray-haired relative received the caress with evident pleasure, and patted Frances' cheek in return. Then she closed the door, where the cold air was streaming in, and leading her companion to the parlor, ushered her in with the words, "Luther, here is Frances."

Luther Bradbury was a man who had made his fortune in New York. He was one of that class of men — old, gray-haired merchants — who wear old-fashioned standing collars, and black cravats which pass twice around the neck before they are tied; whose obituary notices appear frequently in the New York

newspapers now, for their generation is passing rapidly away. There is but little difference in the stories of their lives, — there is the same integrity and mercantile success; only the names differ, and the dates of birth and death, — but these not much, for those who are left are so old, and stand together so near the grave, that when one of them enters it, the dates that are carved upon his tombstone are very near those that appear upon the slabs of his companions. They are, or rather were, a body of men such as our new-fangled commerce does not rear. Commercial conditions were different in their training time. It was before the time of "Exchanges," as we know them, before the time of the telegraph, before the time of steam. Ah! those days had their worth. When news travelled over the world no faster than sailing-vessels and stage-coaches could carry it; when the ships that brought goods from foreign ports were manned by sailors alone; when the regular carriers between here and England were the stately clippers, whose time of arrival could not be fixed on less than a week's margin, and for the sight of whose sails coming up the bay it was not uncommon for a merchant to take an expectant glance off the Battery. That was the time when merchants fetched the outlandish-looking packages of goods of strange tropical shores hither in their own ships; when they met at coffee-houses in midday, with time enough to talk over their consignments then afloat, and to make sales on prices based on a knowledge of limited

and local stocks; when the element of chance in speculation was at a minimum, and the element of brains at a maximum; when men could buy and sell in a natural way, on a basis of facts, without having all calculations upset by some gambler's "bull" or "bear" movement, or by some freebooter's "corner;" when people had money at stake in tangible goods at their full value, and did not trade on "margins."

Luther Bradbury had been prominent in this expiring class. Like many another brave young lad, he had come down from the paternal farm up among the green hills and quiet brooks, — where he had washed sheep, and milked cows, and handled a pitchfork until he had come by large hands and a well-knit frame, — from peaceful seclusion and a sun-browned existence, down to a noisy city; there to go through the usual routine of sweeping out, and lighting fires, and working himself to his best generally, with the ambition of making himself a rich man. He succeeded; as a smart, persevering, spirited lad could in those days. From the start there was not a despondent letter among all the missives he sent back to the old people at home, chronicling his busy life; and the old people at home found much comfort in Luther's turning out so well; and by and by, as they grew infirm, and spent much of their time in their chintz-cushioned, wooden-backed rocking-chairs, looking out of the windows of the old unpainted house — where the mountain-ash let fall a shade upon them — on the road, and the occasional teams passing

by, and on the fields across the road, they thought much, and with much satisfaction, of good Luther. He was present, indeed, to their minds — and to their hearts — mostly as a little boy, he had gone away from home so young; and although the prospering son came home once a year to see them and cheer them (helping Brother John here and there where the farm needed it, with money), yet he was no sooner away again, than he became again to them the little lad Luther, as he was when he lived at the farm years ago.

In due time, however, the feeble old couple had passed away, and two new gravestones appeared in the burying-ground up in the north; and Brother John succeeded to the title, as he had already stepped into the management of the farm. Then, and not till then, when Luther was well on in the world, and in years too, he married, taking for his wife a half-sister of Frances Merley's mother. Then it was that he built the house at Marshton; and there he and his wife lived for nearly ten years. At her death, his sister Miranda had come; and was there with him still, when the orphan Frances Merley came to her guardian's house for her home.

"Come right here, Frances," said the portly old gentleman, extending both his hands; and as she met him, he covered hers together in his large palms. "We're all glad to see you, Frances. Bless my soul! what red cheeks!" and he looked at her admiringly. She received his salutation in silence, with a saucy upright-

ness of pose and imperturbable gaze, though with coquettishly pouting lips, as if pretending to disrelish her warm greeting, and yet seeming to invite a warmer one.

Her uncle scarcely stopped in his speech. "You have not grown too old for me to kiss, have you? No, I thought not," he continued, as she indifferently submitted her cheek to the operation. "How cold your hands are! Come to the fire and get them warm." She followed him demurely to the hearth, where a wood fire was crackling. "Now, Mirandy, let's get these things off. There, that's better; now take this chair and be comfortable." But she stopped to give a caressing recognition to a huge, shaggy St. Bernard, who did obeisance to her in an awkward, mincing fashion, as if he were half ashamed to show pleasure at meeting an old acquaintance. The contrast between her affability with this animal and her coquettish reserve with her uncle seemed to increase the amusement that she had already afforded the old man by her manner.

Indeed, she was a rather captivating young woman as she stood before him. Her blue eyes had some pathos in them, and her face was lit with an amiable glow from some dominant spirit of gentleness within, though a firmness lurked there too; her features were in repose, yet in that sort of living repose which can either pass easily a step farther on into sadness, or break up at once into lines of pretty sauciness; the gold-brown

hair set off pleasingly the broad, bright color in her cheeks. The face, withal, was a hardy one, — fine, yet sturdy in its build; and her pose and figure indicated, somehow, agility and power; so that if it had been a boy's shoulders that held up the head, one might have thought, "He is a pleasing young fellow, and can take his turn well, no doubt, at foot-ball." Her travelling-dress, of some mingled ruddy-brown colors, fitted her well; and seemed, as she moved, to add grace to her movements, — as the handsomeness of a leopard's hide may add grace to the inward ease of motion.

When she took her seat before the wood fire, she had not as yet spoken a word to her uncle. Miranda had disappeared into the dining-room. After a minute or two of silence, she dismissed her pouting look, and turning toward him, her face broke into a smile. "What are you sitting there laughing at me for?" she said; and added, in mock reproof, "You are very rude." Then she arose and adjusted the lamp-shade for him, so that the light should not shine in his eyes.

"You are just the same as ever," he said at last, speaking contemplatively.

"I don't know that that is much of a compliment," she replied, with an assumption of displeasure.

"For all the world," he went on, without noticing her response, "you make me think of your father. You talk like Harry, and act like him; though, of course, a man can't be a saucy coquette."

Her face fell, and she looked into the fire without

answering. He had touched a deep spot in her heart in speaking of her father. From her earliest recollection this father had been the one human soul that she had worshipped, something that was a part of her. As she looked back, she seemed to have emerged with him out of the impenetrable but rosy clouds of her infancy, with the confiding relation already established. Indeed, he had never wanted a better companion than she, none brighter, more lively, more animated, quicker of apprehension or of feeling. He was her prophet, taking the caps, as it were, off all her little spiritual lamps, and spreading spiritual light, one degree of brightness after another, abroad in her; he had walked the fields and the seashore with her, and ridden the waves and watched the sunsets, until the human, corporeal figure of the father came to be but the clay of the twin soul that she valued passionately, above everything else. The great light of that soul went out; and she was alone. Luther Bradbury had never understood what had happened to her, though she was but a girl in short dresses then. He never could.

Now, as if fearing that he might go on, she spoke up quickly, and turned the conversation, answering Luther's many questions about what she had seen in Europe, until Miranda came in.

The old lady seemed at first to take a deep interest in the conversation, and at times winked hard; but after a while there were signs of an approaching crisis. Her lips occasionally quivered, and once or twice they

parted as if she would speak; but no speech came. At last she drew forward to the edge of her chair, and sat up as straight as the comb stood in her hair, looking very hard at her niece. When finally a lull came, she timidly asked Frances if she would not like some supper.

"Supper?" broke out Luther; "why, of course she wants supper; I forgot all about it. Walk right into the dining-room, Frances, and Mirandy will get you whatever you want. We try to keep a pretty full larder here. Don't let her want, Mirandy," was his parting injunction to his sister.

Luther was a good liver; and above all a bounteous one. There was no stint on his board. Strict injunctions had been issued on this point to his sister Miranda; so that, under her administration at least, no such offence had come to light. Every fish and bird in its season found its way to his table; every rare sort of game appeared there; and every out-of-the-way edible from whatever clime and in whatever condition, whether it was a curious vegetable, a peculiarly preserved cheese, or the odd food of some remote barbarian race, — their roads all led to Luther's table, and met there in a cosmopolitan gathering of the fruitage of the earth. Miranda, under advice and information furnished by her brother, had proved herself an able and a faithful lieutenant in making this never-ending collection of viands. Luther's expression to Frances, therefore, that they "tried to keep a pretty full larder,"

was misleading, in so far as it suggested Miranda's lighting a candle and diving into the cellar to see what cold meats there were; whereas the fact was, that an elaborate supper stood prepared in the adjoining dining-room for the traveller, and Miranda's office was simply to open the door and take her in.

That night, after Miranda had gone to bed, and Frances was in the hall, her uncle called her back. She came and stood in the doorway, and after a few moments she said, laughing and assuming an air of disinclination, "I know you want to talk to me about something or other, — I know you do, because you sit just so, and tap the ends of your fingers together, like that;" and she imitated the movements of his fingers.

The old gentleman smiled, but continued his digital gestures, not at all disconcerted. He made no remark, and seemed to fall into a train of thinking.

"Well?" she said finally, turning upon him a friendly, smiling face.

But he was now buried in thought. His head was sunk upon his chest, and he was scowling severely at the fire, while the finger-tips kept up their tattoo on each other. At length, without changing his position or looking at his niece, he said: "It is just three years and one month ago to-day, Frances, that your father was lost; three years — and one — month — ago to-day," he added measuredly; — "lost in yachting. As fine a young man, Frances, as I ever saw, — straight,

compact, sturdy; looking you right in the eye always — always; and he was a gentle boy too; curly red hair, — close little curls, you remember, Frances, — and face as rosy and clean-cut; why, he looked almost like a girl sometimes. I often thought so, and said so to Mirandy; ask her, she 'll tell you. And to think, if he had stayed at home and let the sea alone!" The old gentleman seemed to be speaking to himself. "What use was the sea to him? He was n't trading on it; just off sailing, for his pleasure. Poor fellow! If he had never owned a yacht, and just stayed home and worked away steadily at that business of his, — why, there wan't a man, Frances, of his age in the city that had a richer future than he had, — with those South American connections so well established."

Despite the tenderness of Luther's references to her father, this purely commercial estimate of him gave Frances a notion of an invasion of the memory that was sacred to her; a slight feeling of indignation was aroused, that brought a deeper color into her cheeks.

"Uncle," she said, keeping her eyes fixed on the fire, "this is only preface, is n't it? Let us talk about the rest." Then, as if repenting her speech, she forced a smile and said, half coaxingly, "There is something particular you want to talk about, is n't there?"

The intended apology was unnecessary, for Luther was unconscious of any rude touch on his part. He regarded her for a moment with a puzzled look, as if he did not quite understand why she had interrupted

him, and then replied: "Yes, Frances, there is the property; that is what I was going to talk to you about;" and he settled himself more comfortably in his chair. "There is plenty of property, — enough for any young woman to come into; and there would have been a good deal more, if your father had been more of a saving man than he was. But he was n't, and it was n't in him. He was a generous man, Frances, and gave more help here and there, I guess, than you have any idea of. He never told what he did. But when I came to settle up his affairs, and went over his papers, and saw how he had endorsed for men that he had no sort of business with, — and there was James Lee came to me and told me outright what he had done in one matter, — well, you are not a business person, Frances; but I tell you, your father was a generous man; and if he had kept what he gave and had n't been so fond of the water, with the expense of yachts, he would have left more money than he did."

Frances moved uneasily. Her uncle's eye caught the movement, and he continued, in a sort of apologetic haste: "Well, as I was saying, Frances, your father left you about ninety thousand dollars. It was a little ticklish winding up some things, — he went off so suddenly; and some of his correspondents were rather sharp men, — rather sharp. But old Pendlestack was enough for them. Old Pendlestack was just as sharp as they were. To see him sitting behind that desk of his and looking at you through those spectacles, you

would n't think he knew any more than a — than a — rabbit sitting up on his hind legs. But old Pendlestack brought those two or three bad chaps to terms, and made them do what was right, and without suing them either. And that was all right. But, bless me ! I thought he would wear me out," added Mr. Bradbury, in a tone of reminiscence. "What red tape ! — red tape ! " he soliloquized, as he looked up at the ceiling, and apparently went over in his mind innumerable instances in which Mr. Pendlestack had been busily tying up manually, with red tape, bundles which Mr. Bradbury had, with great labor and assiduity, succeeded in untying. "It takes a business man to do business, Frances, — a business man to do business; and what business was done in your father's estate, I am not ashamed to say I did. That ninety thousand I started with, that has gone up to — let me see: ninety-four, ninety-eight, a hundred and two, a hundred and eight, a hundred and nine thousand; twelve thousand of income not spent, and seven thousand of profits; and every one of the securities is just as good as a Government bond. There is the Kalipolis Horse Railroad stock," and Uncle Luther put his right forefinger on his left thumb; "that 's an eight per cent stock, and laying up a surplus every year; there ain't much of that. There 's the Jonas Higgins mortgage," and the right forefinger travelled to the left forefinger; "that 's a six per cent, and I 'd give myself, to-morrow, four times the amount of the mortgage for the property. Then there 's the

Thomas Martin mortgage," and an advance was made to the next finger; "that 's a six per cent, too. Then there 's the Allen Crombie mortgage," — another jump of the finger; "that 's a seven per cent, and it ain't due for three years yet; property 's worth twice what it was when the mortgage was made. Then there 's the Government bonds," — these were represented by the little finger; "they 're safe, Frances, they 're safe enough," and Uncle Luther nodded to her assuringly; "there 's twenty thousand of them. Then," taking hold of his right thumb, "there 's the Battery Bank stock your father left. I ain't touched that; that 's worth forty-three, but I only call it par. Then there 's the store on Front Street. Carter — I guess you 've heard tell of Carter, I guess you know his daughter Kate; yes, that 's the one. Well, Carter made me a cash offer for that store the other day, and he 's left it open for me to think about it a little; and it 's five thousand above my inventory. There, Frances, that 's all."

Frances heaved a sigh. After a pause she said, "Well, Uncle, I 'm sure you are very good, — very good indeed, to take so much trouble about my affairs;" and she looked at him pleadingly, as if she wanted to be voluble, but did not know what more to say. In default she rubbed the toe of her shoe against the huge dog that was lying at her feet, and who had begun to twitch in his dreams.

"Some day when you are in the city," continued

Luther, "I will take you down town and show you the documents." Then he leaned his head back on his chair and looked at his niece with a smile of satisfaction. She felt embarrassed; she thought that there certainly was something, highly proper and very rotund, which ought to be said at this juncture, but she could not possibly imagine what it was. She only said, somewhat awkwardly, "I thank you, Uncle; I am indeed very grateful for what you have done."

"No thanks, Frances, no thanks," he returned cheerily, rising briskly from his chair; "it is a pleasure as well as a duty, and a great satisfaction to me." He took her hand in both of his, and kissed her forehead as he bade her good-night.

As she turned to leave the room, she stopped to look at a familiar engraving on the wall, wherein a lion and lioness are prowling about a ruined and deserted palace. She had seen the picture there before; but now the sentiment of wildness that filled it struck sharply upon her mind, — a mind just now bent to the artificial intricacy of civilized life, with a vision of mortgages and of curious papers (which she had never seen) called stock.

Without turning her face from the picture, she said, in a languid sort of manner, "I should think it would be very pleasant to be a lion and live in the desert."

"What is that, Frances?" asked Luther.

"Did you ever reflect, Uncle," she continued, "that God made the world without any stocks and bonds in

it, as if it was good enough without them; and that they have been imported into it by man, and now make up the greatest part of his existence?"

"They are useful," said he, in a tone whose decision shaded off into rebuke.

"I don't know whether they are or not," remarked she, defiantly. "I don't like them; they are unnatural. They were not put into the world by the Creator, and they don't belong there. Men see through money spectacles all the time. They don't see the world at all as God made it. They give up all directness of living and make it artificial. It is natural to get a living, and not more than a living, off the earth directly, as the beasts do; one is brought into contact with Nature and becomes simple then; but this walking around on a scaffold above the earth all one's life, in a maze of stocks and bonds, — stocks and bonds obscuring your sight, like clouds of flying locusts, — you are really transplanted to another world, where the atmosphere is stocks and bonds, and every growing thing is stocks and bonds, and where the men themselves turn into walking stocks and bonds, and all their thoughts are fluttering stocks and bonds." She turned round with her face to him. "All this hubbub leads away from Nature; I think I would rather be the lion."

She folded her arms and directed a firm look upon her uncle. His blank face gradually assumed a quizzical expression, and he said, "Would n't you like to work in a factory?"

"No; I would n't."

"What, then? Be a German peasant-woman, perhaps, and work in the field?"

"I don't think I should object to that at all," she returned indifferently, drumming with her foot.

"What a girl you are!" said he, laughing. "Good-night."

She went upstairs; but there again she folded her arms and walked up and down the room, smartly and always in the same place, as a caged animal may. By and by she stopped before the window, where the curtain was not yet drawn, and looked out. The moon shone like bright silver in the deep blue of the night. Below, the fields were silver-gray; and on the lawn the frost prisms twinkled thickly, like little fallen stars from the sky. "I *will* belong to the real world," she said; "I *will!* I will live on the earth!"

CHAPTER II.

A SKATING-PARTY ENDS IN A CHALLENGE.

In the latitude of Marshton it was not often that skating was to be had on Thanksgiving Day. I know a climate, farther north, where we boys used to be sure of both ice and snow-fall before that first holiday of the cold season; and the only question was whether it was the ice or the snow that was to get the upper hand and give us our out-of-door festivity. But at Marshton Thanksgiving was usually a cheerless day, when the "going" was bad, and people cared little to be out of doors. This year, however, there had been sharp frost for two or three days. At night the ground was covered with the frost gems that mimicked the starlit sky; and in the mornings the mist hung over the valleys, and the herbage was a silver-gray, the fields over. At noon the sun thawed the edges of the stiff mud ridges in the roads; but at sundown they hardened again, and the frost sank deeper day by day in the ground; and what was more to the point, by Thanksgiving morning, there was skating on the mill-pond. All the boys in town knew that before breakfast.

The household of Luther Bradbury went to church, of course, that day. But on the way out, Edward Salisbury, the artist, came over to Frances and grasped her hand warmly. The girl's face flushed with pleasure.

"I am glad to see you," cried he, squeezing her hand again in his honest grasp; "and I'm glad to know you've come to stay. How long is it since you were here? Two years? I'll be bound you were n't in long dresses when I saw you last."

"Long dresses!" said she; "do long faces go with long dresses? Am I coming to that?"

"No, no; long faces go with nothing. Come and go skating with us this afternoon!"

Frances' eyes brightened. "I will; but," and her face fell, "I have n't any skates."

"I'll bring you some, and Archie Hiller too."

"And what of Archie Hiller?" queried she.

"Nothing, but that he is a gallant young fellow, and a friend of mine. He is the principal of the high-school."

Edward Salisbury was a great, long, yellow-haired, and yellow-bearded sort of a Norseman, wellnigh on to fifty, but as young as a lad yet. He "painted," the Marshton people said; as he did, — from the Sound and nooks about the Sound, — and sold his pictures for good prices. His cottage was on the outskirts of the village, — the one house in the place, of the new-fangled architecture that re-introduced outside chimneys and small window-panes. The people thereabout

had scoffed much at this deliberate reversion to the ancient, and were of opinion that if they had the money to spend, they would n't put it into any such nonsense. But the artist, superintending the erection of his building and well aware of the current view of it, smiled placidly upon the unspoken disapprobation that he saw on the faces of the inquisitive who prowled about the premises. The house proved a successful venture.

Early in the afternoon, Mr. and Mrs. Salisbury and Mr. Archibald Hiller came; and Mrs. Salisbury, who had not met Frances at the church, fell on her neck and kissed her, to the moving of that young woman to a faint show of tears. Had not Frances been in Europe? The cessation of that vast absence was something to draw on Mrs. Salisbury's emotional depths. Then Mr. Hiller was presented, and they set off for the pond, — Ebenezer Green's mill-pond.

Mr. Salisbury walked with her.

"Do you notice this sky, Miss Merley?" he asked, after a while. "Do you remember how clear the morning was? And I venture to say you could not have detected the progress of this clouding up, if you had tried to. It is the sky of a coming snow-storm. It is a whole story in itself; and if one could only get it on canvas just right, it would almost make a picture alone."

"It is not easily done, then, I infer."

"It is very elusive. You see there are no defined

clouds; it is simply an obscuration, of even color and full of portent, with all the earth under it in a kind of patient hush, submissive to receive the mantle that is surely to descend upon it. This expectancy, — that is the difficult thing to portray; and yet it is so obvious, the sense of it fairly possesses one. Nature seems to tantalize us with her beautiful secrets; holding them before us in full view, as if knowing our inability to snatch them from her hand."

So Mr. Salisbury talked on; freely discoursing of his weakness; making no mystery of his art, its processes and means; telling what he saw in Nature and the difficulty of painting it; — a thoroughly natural man and honest artist.

Ebenezer Green's mill-pond was nearly deserted when the party arrived there, most of the village children being at home at their midday dinners. They clambered down the steep hillside, and sat down on one of the sills of the mill to put on their skates.

Generations ago, one Jonathan Green — his tombstone could no longer be found now, it was so long ago — had stood here and dammed up a brook just where it met the salt water backing in over the broad marshes. The banks rose steep and high around this pond. At its lower end they were the abutments of pasture-land, on whose sides the cattle, with difficult footing, grazed in summer when the herbage was short on the levels. But at its upper end the banks, so it was said, had never been cleared of the original growth.

It had only fallen and rotted. At any rate, they were not cleared now. The beeches and balsams grew thickly side by side, with half their roots exposed on the steep hillside and seeming to carry their weight on a very precarious support. Here, about these wooded slopes, the squirrels lived but little disturbed; the crows were at their noisiest here, — a sure sign that they felt at home and dreaded no molestation; and often from these hillsides, of a still night, the voice of the large owl could be heard in the village. This was the narrow part of the pond, where the creek gurgled into it; the tall banks darkened the water, and the wind seldom ruffled it; rotten, water-soaked logs lay along the shore, on which the mud-turtles basked of a hot summer day; water-moss floated here and there on the surface; and in this still, unfrequented place, the afternoon shadows gathered early, even in summer.

At the other end of the pond, where the mill stood, there was the same atmosphere of quiet, but not the gloom. Here the turning of the huge mill-wheel, the splash of the water, the sound of grinding, and, even when these all ceased, the steady fall of the water going over the dam and spurting through the little cracks in the sluice-gates, gave forth a combination of gentle sounds that was cheering. But there was calm here too. Even the grinding seemed always to go on drowsily; the water-wheel went its round comfortably, with no air of hurry; the eddies in the water as it returned

to the creek from the sluiceway were not angry, foaming things, but gentle, well-proportioned swirls, almost dainty in their movements. Two or three old trees, too, hung over the mill, and drooped some of their boughs on the old half-shingled roof; they were favorite resorts for the birds.

At its best, nowadays, the mill was not a very busy place. Doubtless it had been busier in its day, when flour was not delivered in barrels, from the west, to the inhabitants of Marshton. But the grinding was not all gone, for all that. There were still farmers in that neighborhood who supplied their wants mostly from their own land, who swapped scarcely anything but horses, and brought their grist of wheat and rye and corn and buckwheat still to Ebenezer's mill, — as their fathers had done by Ebenezer's fathers.

The mill itself was a tumble-down structure enough; an unpainted, weather-stained affair, half new and half old, with a rotten, broken board here, and a brand-new yellow patch of hemlock siding there, with a leaky roof above and shaky stanchions below. It was never mended except when it had to be, and was constantly in a condition where it could just maintain its weight and stand the jar of its machinery. In fact, counting the repairs that had been made upon it, it was not at all the same mill that had been originally built. Its timbers and planking and siding and shingles had been changed throughout, gradually, piece by piece, at least half a dozen times since the structure came into being;

so that it was the original mill only in form and not in substance.

Green himself knew its shortcomings, but he was jealous of his old structure; and if you had looked suspiciously at the sagging floor over you, and perhaps thumped a slanting stanchion, he would have looked at you with a pained air and said, "Them timbers is sound."

However tranquil may have been the mill and its neighborhood on ordinary days, on this Thanksgiving Day the tranquillity seemed to have deepened into solemnity. A Sabbath stillness reigned over the premises. No grist had been poured into the hopper to-day; no grating of grinding had disturbed the atmosphere of the interior; no rumble had shaken the old beams. No key even had turned in the rusty padlock; the owner was absent from his mill-deck. A desolation, in consequence, seemed to reign over the place, which the occasional shouts from the few youngsters above on the pond, and the rippling of the brook near at hand, only made the more profound. One could have imagined that the tottering life of the old mill had at last come to its end, and that the hush that was now upon it was but the beginning of the hush that was to last forever; but it is a matter of history now that on the following day Ebenezer came and touched the old structure to life again, and the rumble was heard as before.

The quiet was pleasing to Miss Merley; so was the

presence of Mr. Archibald Hiller. What young lady is not slightly exhilarated when a handsome young fellow puts on her skates for her? And what becomes of the exhilaration when he curvets about her on the ice, with his cheeks and eyes glowing and mischievous banter on his tongue? Do not the skate-runners ring out music then? What if the wind blows, and, moaning among the firs, brings down its sigh to the skaters' ears? It is only a mocking little love-sigh of the wind; see how he capers across the hillsides, whirling the fine snow before him, throwing it in sheets, and ever picking it up and ever whirling it on to other resting-places! — a merry dance he is having of it on the earth to-day! What if little white patches are gathering on the ice? They cannot spoil the skating for an hour yet.

The lower end of the pond at last became tame to Mr. Hiller, and he made a proposition to explore the mysterious recesses of the upper end. That was acceptable to his companion, and they started off in the teeth of the storm. As they went on, the pond narrowed and the skate-tracks became fewer. They were up between the steep banks among the firs, and the wind howled high overhead. But they kept on, — the frost bits sticking in the skaters' hair like pearls; and the cheeks and eyes were bright still, and the lips red to keep them brilliant company.

Here it was so quiet now that they could talk easily. "How strange it seems," said he, "to be skating

along here by these spruce boughs when the last time I was here I had to come to them by a boat!" He skated toward the bank and pulled off a spray of balsam. It seemed like a triumph over the summer inaccessibility of the place.

"Yes, I like it," was Frances' response.

They came at last, on the right, to a cove, which was the very head of the pond. Just above it the creek came in. They turned into the little bay with its straight, rocky back. It was even more cosy than the sheltering shore outside had been. At the foot of the ledge lay an old log. It was so plainly a place to rest, that they both, having reached their journey's end, sat down on the old piece of timber to regain their breath. Here they were, half a mile from all the other skaters, the sleet scudding high over their heads, and stillness about them. Even the sighing of the wind through the trees above was carried off quickly on the gale, and only reached them faintly. They rested there. To each of them it seemed to be natural to be in the other's society and to be surrounded by quiet. Their vivacity had subsided, and they sat in silence for a while. Archie took off his hat and wiped his forehead, and Frances began to kick a little hole in the ice with the heel of her skate.

"May I smoke a cigarette, Miss Merley?"

"Certainly."

He took one from his pocket slowly and lit it very deliberately, as if he were not at all embarrassed. The

match remained burning in his fingers, and he idly applied it to the end of a dry twig that lay beside him. It caught and burned.

"How would it do to have a fire?" he suggested.

She watched him without answering, while he lazily scraped some dry stuff together without getting up and heaped it over the burning stick before him. Then he drew some larger sticks off the bank, and soon there was a brisk little fire blazing before them. Frances threw back her coat, and undid the colored kerchief that was about her neck, dangling it in her hand. She was at peace with herself here, as she had been ever since she had left the house on this skating excursion; and the relief from the hampered feeling of the last day or two was too grateful to make her willing to break this sitting all at once. They both sat and watched the fire burn.

At length she said: "Mr. Salisbury told me you had charge of the high-school. Do you like it?"

"Yes, oh yes; well enough," replied Archie, half fighting shy of this unexpected entrance upon his personal affairs, and half unwilling to make the effort of settling in his own mind just how much he did like it. "I have n't had enough experience in other things, you see," he added apologetically, when he found that Frances remained silent, "to know just how much I like this particular thing."

"No opportunity for comparison," she returned.

"Exactly."

"Then you are not enthusiastic about it."

"Enthusiastic? why, no; I don't think I am. At least, I like the scholars very well, and I like to teach them, and we get along pleasantly together. I presume I like it as much as I should like anything. To tell the truth, I think I like one thing about as well as another, now that you set me thinking about the matter."

"You are not subject to strong dislikes, then?"

"No; or yes, I think I might be. But bad things mostly run off me like rain off a duck's back."

"Perhaps you are of a forgiving nature, then," she suggested, looking at him with a friendly light in her eyes.

"Possibly. I never thought of it in that way."

He drew another cigarette out and lighted it at the fire, and putting some more sticks on the blaze, he leaned back against a tree-trunk a few minutes, as if in a reverie. This unexpected questioning on the part of his companion, which was evidently not mere inquisitiveness, was tending to establish a gentler relation than the earlier hilarity of the afternoon could have brought about.

"Are n't you afraid of catching cold?" he asked at length with some consideration, eying her open jacket.

"No," she answered quickly. Then she asked, in a tone that begged a pardon for the impertinence, "Why did n't you go home for Thanksgiving?"

He shrugged his shoulders and replied, laughing, "Home? why, I have n't been home for a long time." He looked at her quizzically. "The fact is, Miss Merley, I have n't any home, except Mrs. Wormsley's, and I expect to go there; we have a late dinner to-day."

She mused a few moments, and then persisted: "But why don't you go somewhere, — to some uncle's, or brother's, or some place of that kind?"

"There is none, absolutely none," replied Archie; "no brother, no sister, no — Yes, stop, there is an uncle; he has not invited me."

"You are alone, then; no father, no mother?" she added timidly.

"No," said Archie; "neither."

A pause ensued. Then he said: "I scarcely remember my father at all. My mother died about three years ago. That left me quite alone. In college, of course, I made some friends, but none very intimate, — none so intimate as to come hunting me up in this small place, to get me to take a Thanksgiving dinner at his home. That is the state of things, in brief."

"You must have gone to college rather young," remarked Frances, after a pause, in a tone that seemed to slight his age.

"Not so very," he replied carelessly. "I left at the end of two years."

"What was that for? — some prank?" she asked.

"No; money."

Frances colored slightly. "I have heard," she remarked indifferently, as she turned her head away, "of young fellows who worked their way through college."

"So have I," he answered; "and I have seen them doing it, and I have been sorry for them. They miss a great deal that makes up the real college life. I suppose the degree amounts to something. But as for the learning, that could be got outside, if any one really cared for it. For my own part, I thought I had better go and teach."

"And do you study now?" she inquired.

"Yes," he answered, with a little laugh that showed a disinclination to go into any self-praise.

They were both silent for a little while. Finally she asked, "Do you look like your mother?"

It was not such a strange question, after all. There was such refinement in the young fellow's dark face, and so close an approach to a feminine delicacy in his features, though withal he was manly-looking and had a manly enough bearing, that it had naturally occurred to her that the departed mother must be represented here, in his own face.

"That is an embarrassing question," answered Archie, with a smile. Then, as his face grew serious, he continued: "I always thought my mother was a rather beautiful woman. Her face was a delicate one in its features." He stopped. But the spirit seemed to be working within him for utterance, and in a few moments he went on again, almost in an undertone:

"She was a very quiet, gentle woman. She was wrapt up in me. We were left alone together when I was very young. I thought a good deal of her." There was a very slight tremor in his voice, evidence of an earnestness sought to be repressed.

The little bonfire had nearly burned out. A few small embers only still flickered on the ice. Neither of them spoke for a minute. As they sat there, they were both startled by a panting, shaggy beast, that came running and slipping around the point of the cove.

"Why, Boreas!" exclaimed Frances.

The big dog came and sniffed first her clothes and then Archie's; then he squatted down on his haunches and peered with an earnest phiz out into the storm. His mistress smoothed his coat in an absent-minded way; and there was silence, save for the rush of the tempest overhead.

At length Frances arose and buttoned her coat. "Come," she said, "it is time to be going." Archie threw away his cigarette and followed her to the edge of the cove.

Just above where the couple now stood, the creek, dashing into the pond with a swift current, had kept a patch of water unfrozen. She skated up toward the spot, Archie following her, until they were on only a narrow strip of ice, with the open water at their feet both above and below them.

"Don't go too near," he said.

She stopped where she was, and looked at the dark water and across at the opposite bank, which was not far off.

"Now," she said, "if this was the olden time, and a knight was here, I would throw this handkerchief" — holding in front of her the bright-colored thing that she had unfastened from her neck — "over there, and bid him go and get it. The chances are it would be a difficult thing to bring back."

She turned and looked at him. His eyes were as bright as hers.

She held the little streamer aloft. Who can ever tell whether she let it go purposely, or whether a sudden blast carried it by accident out of her hand? At all events, it went fluttering away, and was swept by the gale across the opening to a lodgment on a little strip of thin ice where the water was deep. There was no way to get it again, but to skate around the opening and take the chance of the ice being thick enough. Possibly, by scrambling up the bank where they stood, and by a search in the woods and cutting a sapling, a pole might have been got; and by ignobly crossing the stream above, on a swinging wooden fence that was there, a spot might have been reached on the opposite shore whence the mischief-making piece of silk could have been safely fished up.

But when the thing had flown away, and Frances turned round upon Archie, biting her lip and looking into his face with mischievous eyes, only one thought

came into that young man's mind. A laugh came over his face; he accepted the challenge and dashed away, skating around the opening toward the uncertain ice, to regain the lost kerchief. He had just time to pick it up, when he went in and was thoroughly soused. Reaching the bank below, and standing dripping there, he laughed for a moment at his own plight and at the excitement of Boreas, who was barking loudly; then he came and returned the token, which he had preserved quite dry, daintily to the hand of its owner. She received it with but a word of thanks, as if he had done nothing but pick it up for her from a drawing-room floor.

"Go home!" she commanded suddenly, after a moment, as she perceived him shivering. "Go home as fast as you can!"

"I will accompany you back to the rest of the party, if you please," he interposed.

"You will not. Take off your skates here, and take the short path. There it is!" she said, pointing up the opposite hill.

Her tone was that of a military command. He went to the shore and began to take off his skates, looking at her doubtfully.

"Don't be so slow!" she cried, stamping her foot.

He went to work then more actively; when his skates were off, she bade him good-by, and calling Boreas, went gliding off down the pond. But she had gone only a few rods when she turned and skated back. There was a hesitating look of penitence in her

eyes as she stopped before him, while he stood halfway up the bank. "If you would n't look ridiculous in it, I would make you wear my coat."

"Oh, I don't want it," he laughed.

"Hurry, then," she called, in a softened tone.

"Good-by!" he answered. "But I am only obeying you," he protested, "in leaving you this way."

"Good-by!" she called again, as she skated away, turning her face to him with the friendliest of looks on it.

Mr. and Mrs. Salisbury (their children being away) and the Rev. E. Taylor Clerkenwell, the young Episcopal clergyman, were guests at Uncle Luther's board that Thanksgiving Day. The talk turned, in time, on Marshton town topics of a public nature, such as the roads and the schools. These were Mr. Bradbury's chief concerns, outside of his odds and ends of affairs in New York; and as he was the leading personage in the village in these matters, he felt that he spoke with authority. As to the schools, he was the chairman of the board of school visitors; and when he came to discourse of the high-school, and of its master, Mr. Hiller, he shook his head. "The fact is," he said impressively, looking at Mr. Salisbury, "it is my opinion that that young Hillier is a light weight."

At these words of her uncle, Frances sat bolt upright in her chair and said, in a tone of stout defiance, "He is not!"

Mr. Bradbury looked at her in surprise. She sur-

veyed him defiantly at first; but presently a deep blush came and she bent her head. There was a silence for a few moments; then Salisbury said, laughing, "I understand that Hiller had a wetting at the pond this afternoon on account of Miss Merley, or rather of a portion of her apparel; we can't be surprised, then, at this defence."

"Ah, well," rejoined her uncle, after a moment, "if that is the case, it won't do to persist in criticising Hillier."

The talk about the school was resumed; but "young Hillier" was not discussed any further.

The tempest was still driving that night when Frances went to bed. It was so thick that although the moon was, by the calendar, in the clouds, yet it was very dark. But she thought she could see where the path lay along which Archie must have come on his way from the pond in the afternoon. She fancied him running along there in his drenched clothes, his skates in his hand, cold and shivering. "Poor fellow!" she said; "his mother would not have treated him so." She stood there and thought. The mother was in heaven. She, Frances, was on earth, and had come with a kind of polluting touch, with her caprice, to this mother's boy. At the moment her coquetry seemed contemptible. "Shame to me!" she said, in her self-scorn; "shame!" At that moment her eyes fell on a painted miniature of her father, which she herself had placed, on her arrival, on the mantel-piece.

The sacredness of relation between the living and the dead, as it existed in her own case, came vividly before her; and the thought that she had treated harshly one whom another had loved, as her father had loved her, made passionate tears fall from her eyes.

CHAPTER III.

MRS. WORMSLEY'S.

ARCHIE HILLER had made his way home without any unnecessary delay after his bath in the creek. He made rapid work with his toilet; and when Mrs. Wormsley's mild and unobtrusive dinner-bell was heard tinkling in the hall below, he went down looking rosy and bright. But the brightness in his eyes was not all due to the physical reaction from his bath. The incident with Miss Merley—her caprice, her challenge, and her friendliness afterward—gave him a light step and a light heart. If conversation had been possible at Mrs. Wormsley's table, doubtless he would have made the table very lively with his talk.

But it was impossible. Mrs. Wormsley herself was not a conversationalist. She, a somewhat shrivelled and unprepossessing woman, presided at her table with a watchful eye, which, secure behind her spectacles (through which it was impossible to trace the movement of her optics without a very rude and long-continued gaze), only observed from day to day, with precision, how much it took to satisfy her boarders' appetites; being enabled thus to calculate her daily

marketing to a nicety. There was money in that; and that was what Mrs. Wormsley kept boarders for; — at least, it was a sin to waste money. Everybody at her table speedily became impressed with that fact; and the seriousness of it, and the consciousness that they were ever being gauged as to their appetites seemed to keep them sombre and dull, as if they were in a treadmill and under a hard surveillance. A second piece of pie was no more to be thought of than a haunch of venison, though there might be more in the dish. No one dreamed of asking for it. Mrs. Wormsley's discipline was perfect; they all sat in thrall.

Silence, however, did not reign absolutely supreme. Parks, the grocery clerk, was not wholly suppressible. He was always likely to say something, in a timorous way, about the weather, or to announce some new fact in the village world; as, for instance, that Deacon Bronson was sowing beets this year in the bed that he sowed turnips in last year, because he see the seed-paper in a stick on the bed and read it as he come along, and he knew mighty well that was where the turnips was last year; or, that old Mr. Long's cow had dropped a bullcalf two years running now, and it was a pity, considering the old man wanted to raise a heifer out of that particular cow; or, that he noticed a new tin gutter put on Mrs. Mather's wood-shed, — had noticed it as much as a week ago, and it wan't painted yet, — did n't know as she was ever going to paint it;

and so on. But these remarks seemed to wither as they bloomed; for no one ever responded, and Parks never raised his eyes when he made them, nor ever acted as if he expected any sort of reply, or any attention whatever to be accorded to what he said.

Then there was Newcomb, who was the agent at the railroad station. What Newcomb did not know about the coming and going of the people of Marshton — where they went, why they went, and when they were coming back — was not worth knowing. He acquired some insight into their affairs, also, by the careful consideration of such telegrams as he received and sent for them. But Newcomb was not talkative. He kept his mouth shut, and followed the ways of the Marshton folk with his eyes and ears only. Fortunately, he had no wife to wring these secrets from his bosom and start them in circulation through the town; else the whole population might have been set by the ears. Only on infrequent occasions, when, being in company, he heard assertions which were so far wide of the truth as to seem to him an affront to his special knowledge, would this reticent man suddenly explode and indignantly deny the statement, abuse the astonished gossip for uttering such stuff, and then proceed to state the matter as he knew it, — briefly, authoritatively, and finally; so that, whether he was doubted or not, he was never directly contradicted. Should any one, by chance, have been hardy enough timidly to question some point in his narrative, he would only snappishly reply,

"I have said my say, and that 's the end of it; if you think you know better, all right; some folks think they know more 'n anybody else." Then he would button up his coat and walk away with dignity.

But the most silent member of this silent circle — not that it was possible for any man to be more taciturn, in point of fact, than Mr. Newcomb, but because he seemed more unlikely than Mr. Newcomb ever to talk — was a gray-haired gentleman named Caleb Warburton. He kept much to his own room in the Wormsley abode, receiving his daily paper and smoking his pipe, wearing always the same clothes, which never wore out, and answering all mildly and courteously.

Opposed to these gentlemen, as it were, there sat next to Mrs. Wormsley, as a coadjutor rather than a boarder, Miss Christina, — a lady whose last name is unknown to the writer to this day, but who appeared to sustain some vague and shadowy relationship to the mistress of this house. A rather gaunt personage she was, of uncertain years, simpering manners, and adorned at all times with a conspicuous combination of ribbons and embroidered things. She it was alone who invited conversation, who blushed with interest over Parks's epigrams of news and murmured a monosyllabic testimonial of her assent, who smiled winsomely but vainly upon the immovable Newcomb, and who was extravagantly respectful to the quiet dignity of Mr. Warburton. Sitting thus, with amiable aspect, by the side of Mrs. Wormsley, — who, to tell the truth, looked rather sour

in her premature wrinkles and half-mourning caps, — she did appear as a sort of lieutenant to her elder relative, furnishing urbanity to the small hostelry of which Mrs. Wormsley was the severe business manager.

Such was Archie Hiller's domestic circle in Marshton, and such were the companions who sat at meat with him on this Thanksgiving Day. His excitement, which might have broken out into who knows what bright sayings, had the surroundings been favorable, resulted in barrenness under the sobering influences of the silent repast; and when at length he returned to his room, a reaction of quietude had set in, which the stillness of his chamber did not disturb.

It was an upper apartment, heated by a sheet-iron coal stove, well calculated to warm but not to cheer. An ingrain carpet, of large and unhandsome pattern, covered the floor unblushingly. A large mahogany bureau — an antique affair with glass knobs for handles, descended from some of the unknown and remote of the Wormsley dead — held his clothes and occupied an undue share of the area of the room. A high-post bedstead of varnished maple, but without any canopy, — the bedding spread with a faultlessly white counterpane, — looked, on the whole, uninviting. The long, gilt-framed looking-glass that hung over the washstand distorted frightfully whatever was seen in it; so that the room seemed all askew, and the human form as reflected by it might have been the product of the wild fancy of a madman. The paper

on the walls was somewhat dingy, showing nosegays of uniform pattern, proceeding at regular intervals in a diagonal line from the baseboard to the blue border at the ceiling, all round the room, until one might have wished never to see again the flowers that made those nosegays. The windows were screened with muslin shades. There was a white wooden mantel-piece, standing flat against the wall, carved into fluted fans after the old fashion. The fireplace was not open as in the olden time, now that the cylinder stove had come in, but was boarded up, and the same sort of nosegays travelled up the fireboard that climbed the walls; even the carpet was stretched tightly up to the fireboard, as if to hide with shame the fact that there had ever been a comfortable hearth there, and that the bricks were still in place beneath. On a round table, standing in the middle of the room and covered with a figured black-and-red cloth, were some books and a lamp; the lamp was of glass, with a green pasteboard shade, which contained some common colored paper transparencies for ornamentation. By the table was a rocking armchair, with a high back of upright rails, and supplied with comfortable-looking, well-worn cushions. Here, evidently, the occupant of this room had sat many and long evenings, thinking, smoking, reading, dreaming. There was not a sign about the room, except the little piles of books on the centre-table, to show that it was anything more than the forbidding chamber of an old-fashioned New

England country-house, used to sleep in and nothing more.

Archie dropped into the rocking-chair and braced his slippered feet upon a rim of the stove, while he drew a cigar from his pocket and lit it with a slip of paper thrust in upon the coals. He puffed his weed long without stirring, his eyes wandering from the coals up to the ceiling, where they studied hard the crack that ran along the top of the blue border, and then back again to the coals, — hard, anthracite coals, which finally looked him out of countenance. He dropped his feet on the floor, leaned forward with his elbows on his knees and resting his face on his fists, and poured smoke into the stove-door and watched it go off into the stove-pipe. Finally he got up and walked about the room, with his hands in his trousers pockets, in a careless way, evidently carrying lightly whatever was on his mind, — for he occasionally smiled as he walked, — until his cigar was finished.

"It was so confoundedly unexpected," he muttered to himself. He looked a handsome fellow as he stood there. His dark brown hair was brushed very smartly back from his temples, in almost feminine waviness; his regular features were cleanly cut, and with his red cheeks and ears and his clear gray eyes, he was a picture of vitality; while his first young mustache, curling over the corners of his mouth, told that he was not so very many months out of his boyhood. More than one girl in the days that were past, had liked to have Archie

for her beau. He was so agreeable, so good-natured, so rosy and laughing, — though nobody's fool, and keen enough to carry himself cleverly with his companions, both girls and boys. Withal he was an unaffected young fellow, not knowing whether he looked well or not, nor ever thinking about it, — though he was anxious, for a time, over the mustache; but that was a matter of being a man rather than a fop. His mind, too, went well with his face. It was clean and bright and clear. No malice lodged there; no ill thought, no wrong, was cherished there, — nothing but what was pure and kind. He looked at the bright and poetical side of all things; nor as yet at least — and he was never like to — had he compassed the deeper problems of existence, the meannesses of social human life, the insincerity to be found in it, nor the depth of human nature.

It did not occur to him that the incident at the mill-pond might possibly have come about through a certain depth of nature in Miss Merley; that it was a by-play of extravaganza, darting up out of a large reservoir of restive energy. It only appeared to him as a piece of unusual friskiness; and the girl who was capable of challenging a young gentleman to a sousing in order to recover a handkerchief which she had wilfully lost, he considered to be a rather lively young lady, whose sense of fun was keen. He deemed her to be a very self-possessed young woman, too, to have conducted herself so coolly after she had procured his wetting; and he wondered how he had come to obey her when

she told him to go home, — he would n't have done it for other girls. On the whole, he considered that she had shown herself a very merry and a very capable girl. For himself, he was much amused that he could have been pricked into such a plight, and that he had been as obedient as a child afterward. He remembered now the saucy calmness of her face as she looked at him when she thanked him for the handkerchief. He saw it still, at this moment, as he leaned on the back of the rocking-chair and gazed at the coals in his stove. It struck him as a very pleasing face. The color that the exercise and the storm had brought into it was charming; it glowed with health and life, and as it had been rather pretty to start with, he liked to bring it again and again before his mind's eye. The placidity of expression which it wore, underlaid everywhere with lurking mischief, quite captivated him.

"Heigh-ho!" he said with a sigh; "I suppose I shall see her again, and it won't do to spend all this evening thinking over that ducking, or rather over what went on before and after it, not even if it is a holiday night. Books, books; I must take a book." So he set himself down in the easy-chair and fumbled round on the table for a book. "Greek; no, not Greek to-night; Latin would n't be so bad, though. By the way," he muttered, "I must read ahead in that Virgil for Monday's lesson to the Salisbury and Lawrence boys. Here we are."

He opened the Æneid where it tells how the

Greeks, the gates unbarred by the men in the horse, swarmed into Troy, and how the moon was shining peacefully into Æneas' chamber and all the house was in slumber; when the Trojan captain awakes with the great clamor that is abroad in the streets, and starts up from his dreams to fight. The description of the quiet of the night — a night fit for the fairies in Asia Minor to be out and up to all sorts of silent pranks — invited the fairies of the reader's mind to steal in upon the page before his eyes and engage him there, to the interruption of the story of the fall of Troy. One picture and another, of some flitting sweetheart of his boyhood, laughed and pouted before him amid ever-changing scenes; now it was a country lane, green and shaded, where there walked beside him a bright blue-eyed young thing, scarcely in long dresses, the summer breeze ruffling her hair while she swung her straw hat by long ribbons; anon it was a vision of puffy fabrics of lawn and gauze and a delicate face smiling above them, — all in a brightly lighted room where there was much hum of conversation, and a scent of flowers borne in on the breath of the June night through wide-open windows; again the scene changed to winter, with the rough hair of buffalo robes brushing his hand, and sleigh-bells jingling in the frosty air, and the runners whizzing through the snow; but then, with the association of winter, there would come into sight Ebenezer Green's mill-pond, and the dreamer suddenly found himself face to face with Frances Merley on the ice.

Reflection led to reflection, and the last reflection lasted the longest: all, memories of the various inclinations of a youthful, sunny heart, as merry as the light young hearts to which it inclined; memories not unlike in kind, even the last one not unlike the others in kind. For although this dreamer was older now, he was still not so old but that women were all of a sort. Some, indeed, he liked, and some he did not; but that was the only division; and all those he had ever liked were still only one class, — girls and women, — they were a species without variety. He had not yet delved so deep as to learn that no two women's minds are alike. His vision was not yet microscopic enough to note fine differences of temperament which might produce world-wide differences of sympathy and action.

He aroused finally from his fairy travels, and was about to take up the thread of the events that befell during that fateful night in Troy, when a sudden thought seemed to strike him. He laid down his book, and going to the bureau opened a drawer whence he took out a box, and out of the box the pieces of a flute. "This is better," he said to himself. On top of the bureau was a little pile of music. He pulled the sheets over, and making his selections, set one on the table and began to play. The pieces were mostly adaptations from Italian operas; but he soon laid them aside and brought out a book of ballads, which seemed to be more to his mind. He played them with much delicacy of conception and taste. It seemed an incon-

gruous thing that such unromantic walls should resound to such soft and winning music; that such coldness of surrounding should receive such warmth of gentle sentiment as the flute breathed out. It seemed, at least, if the tender notes did rise in that room, that they should not be confined there, but should stream forth through an open window, and, floating abroad, the cadences of the melody should fall upon some young maid's sympathetic ear, causing her to turn and listen, or perchance straying into some sick-room divert some sufferer from his ills for a moment.

In truth, they did perform some such errand as the latter; for they found their way, without much trouble, into Mr. Caleb Warburton's room, where they hit upon that gentleman buried in a reverie of his own. What influence they had upon the stream of his thought, how they affected him, what resurrection they caused of old scenes, of old faces, long since passed away from this lonely, gray-haired man, we do not know. But undoubtedly they were a blessing to him; for erelong the musician heard a gentle knock upon his door, and upon bidding his visitor enter, Mr. Warburton appeared upon the threshold. His manner was hesitating. Very gravely he begged Mr. Hiller's pardon for intruding; he hoped he did not intrude; he would like very much, if Mr. Hiller did not object, to sit down by the stove and finish his pipe while Mr. Hiller went on playing. "You won't mind me," he added; "I shall be as still and insignificant as a

mouse;" and a faint smile played on his lips as if he were passing an unfavorable reflection upon his quiet ways. He evidently saw welcome in Archie's manner, for he advanced. Archie, in fact, was much surprised at seeing Mr. Warburton in his room. But he was touched at the event, as well. He had long had, mingled with a slow curiosity, a lingering pity for the quiet gentleman. For he seemed to be one who had lived his life through, spiritually speaking, and yet retained his vigor of body. He gave the impression that he had once been an active man, and that some calamity or dire, untoward occurrence had left him forlorn, with no desire to mix further with human affairs; as if he had come by some ill, which nothing could cure. To this quiet village of Marshton, where apparently he had no friend or acquaintance, it seemed as if he had strayed to wither away to his original dust in peace; and although he was urbane to all whom he met, he said as little as he could, and lived in reality as much by himself as if he had been a hermit in the fields.

It was something of a shock of pleasure, therefore, to Archie, when he divined that the tones of his flute must have pierced the musty wrappings of the lonely heart, and begotten in it a desire for companionship,— a desire so strong as to cause the old man to break through his settled habits, and present himself at a door, where, near neighbor as he was, he had never presented himself before, and where he could not be sure he was desired.

So, with heartiness, he bade him sit down and enjoy his pipe, and said he would take him at his word and play on, and that, for intrusion, there was none; and not being in the least a self-conscious fellow, he did go on with his playing in a natural way, and Mr. Warburton did sit as still as a mouse, peacefully drawing on his pipe, the smoke curling gently upward and resting over his gray head, one might imagine, like the hovering of some angel wing of peace over the modest contentment beneath.

When Archie had finished playing such airs as he found a mood for, he laid his flute down and offered his visitor a cigar; for the smoke was no longer curling from the old pipe. But the guest declined it, saying that he would refill his pipe if Mr. Hiller had no objection; and pulling a leathern pouch from his pocket, he poured his pipe full; and carefully tearing a strip from an old envelope that he produced, and lighting it in the stove, he thus fired his pipe, to the saving of the match that Archie had laid on the table for him. Then, when the young host had found a chair for himself and had lighted a cigarette, the visitor fell back into his quietude of manner, gazing upon the floor; while the smoke ascended from the bowl peacefully and lazily, as before.

After a lapse of some minutes, during which they both smoked in silence, Mr. Warburton asked, in a hesitating tone, "Do you like your school, Mr. Hiller?"

Archie replied with a tendency to an effusiveness

of manner, in acknowledgment of the interest of his aged acquaintance in the subject, that he liked it very well; of course there were some annoyances; naturally some of the pupils were refractory.

Mr. Warburton meditated upon the answer in silence. Then he asked, hesitatingly again, as if he considered himself to be venturing, "Do all your annoyances come from the pupils?"

The inquirer here raised his eyes to Archie's with something of a searching look, as if watching to detect any evasion of his question. But the action was unnecessary.

"Why, yes," returned Archie, surprised. "I don't know of any other, unless it is when the fire does n't burn well."

Mr. Warburton resumed his downward gaze and his silence. Silence was evidently so habitual with him, and he was so free from any sign of embarrassment under it, that Archie too became quite at his ease, and, not feeling like intruding upon the old man's quietude, left him to speak when he would. At length Mr. Warburton turned upon him with a face that had lost none of its fixed character of desolation and faded interest, yet was warmed with an expression of friendliness and said: "You will pardon me for saying what I am going to say. You are light-hearted and young. I am an old man; that is," he continued, as he smiled, "not so very old in years, though I am old enough to be gray. But I am old, as you are young. I am on my

way out of life, as you are just entering it. I have had my experience; you are beginning yours. I am familiar with what possible ills there may be in an ordinary human life, — some of the ills, I mean, — and perhaps know human nature better than you can. If I can put you on your guard by a timely word, I should like to, if you will allow me."

The old gentleman here removed his pipe from his lips and awaited some sign from Archie; but seeing acquiescence in his face, he went on, while he nervously raised and lowered the lid of the Æneid that lay on the table: "I chanced to hear some of the gentlemen of this place, who, I believe, have the governing of the school, conversing; it was in the post-office while we were waiting for the mail to open, and I could not help hearing. I think they were expressing some dissatisfaction with the way the school was being conducted by the teacher. I think there was some mention of Latin and Greek, — some mention of it."

Mr. Warburton's inflection gave the impression that something more was to follow. But he said nothing, after all, except once more to excuse his liberty in mentioning the matter; and even while Archie was yet thanking him, he arose and went to the door, and bidding him good-night, departed.

Archie liked it that the old man had come in and given him this friendly jog. His thoughts dwelt more on the friendly element than they did on the practical bearing of the call. When he did come to that he

only growled: "Old fogies, those school-visitors! grumblers! — what do they know about school-teaching?" Whatever they knew about it, they had all to do about it, and gave him his office only at their pleasure. He was conscious that the school was being properly conducted, and that was enough. What if three boys, two of them Salisbury's, were being taught Latin and Greek preparatory to their going to college? These fellows were old fogies, of course; and he reverted to and dwelt only on the friendly element in Warburton's call.

Even this pleasant subject did not long displace his recollection of the afternoon on the ice. As he sat before the stove, he picked up his skates and looked at them and handled them, seeming to be absorbed in the cold steel things as if they took him back to the time and place of the little romance of the day; and there he sat dreaming, — over the skates, not over his wet clothes. They — taking on at this very hour a sort of personality to Frances Merley's mind as she stood by her storm-beaten window — they were drying in Mrs. Wormsley's kitchen. Archie had not thought of them, nor of anything — but the young woman.

CHAPTER IV.

HOME FROM CHURCH.

WHEN Frances Merley awoke the morning after Thanksgiving and reviewed the afternoon of yesterday, she was conscious of a certain fresh pleasure and zest introduced into her existence. The regret, amounting to the dignity of remorse, of the evening before, over the severity of her sport with Archie Hiller had passed away; and there was a tingle of pleasurable expectation as to what might come next, should she happen to meet him again.

The storm had covered the ground during the night with a few inches of snow and sleet. But the weather turned warm, and, under a bright sun, the snow was melting fast; and the frost, which had so laboriously got into the ground, was coming out again with a splutter. Late in the afternoon she braved the bad walking and went to the post-office for the mail. The usual village gathering was there, waiting in numbers that crowded the room for the mail to open. Archie, as it happened, was in the throng, and he bowed pleasantly to her; but Frances gave him only a curt nod and turned away. If she had felt like making amends

to him the evening before, she was evidently in another mood now.

When they were coming out she unfortunately dropped a letter in the mud. She was conscious that Archie was just behind her, and she gave a little stamp of her foot in vexation at what she foresaw would follow. He picked up the letter before she could move to do so, and handed it to her, hat in hand, as gracefully as possible. She received it with a short "Thank you." He lingered a moment, as if he would have been glad to join her; but she turned her back upon him and walked off.

She did not see him again until the following Sunday; and then it was in church. To tell the truth, she would not have seen him even then if he had not discovered that on this particular Sunday he was inclined to try the Episcopal service. He usually went to the Congregational meeting. He had a notion that he wanted to hear how Mr. Clerkenwell was preaching now, as he had only heard him once, and that was when the young rector first came, some six months or more ago. Besides, he thought it would be an agreeable change for once.

So he went and sat in the transept, where he could see Frances should she come, sitting in Mr. Bradbury's aisle-pew. She did come; and the glances were stolen — by him, but not by her. She cast not one look in his direction, though she may have known that he was there.

Archie, however, was not a fellow to be daunted by

a little cold behavior on the part of a young lady whom he admired. After the service he blandly presented himself to Miss Merley, just as she was coming out of her uncle's pew. There was no escaping a face-to-face meeting this time. She took his greeting amiably, and they walked out to the church door under the noise of the organ, side by side. It so chanced that the other members of her family had gone homeward. Archie then asked, with a dash of boldness in his manner, "May I walk home with you?"

"You may," she answered.

There was a brief silence as they set out. He did not like to waste valuable time — for the way was short — by getting involved in a talk upon impersonal subjects; and so he waited for some personal topic to come in the way. He was not alone in his wish. The heart that was beating next to his was beating much more with reference to Archie Hiller than he had any idea of. The fact was, that after having snubbed him far beyond the limit of polite snubbing, Frances had come by another mood, and a meditative one, in which she bethought herself that she had, upon the whole, treated this young gentleman — who evidently found it pleasant to be with her, and whose society she in turn did not wholly dislike — rather shabbily. A certain manifestation in him which she could not quite fix, — as to any particular look or gesture or word, but which she felt, — of a tendency to follow, rather than to lead, aroused in her a sense of being a protection to him.

He appealed to her own self-reliance. She seemed to herself, in a hazy, undefined way, without ever recognizing it distinctly, to have strength to spare for him. Although he was older than she was by two or three years, and had seen more of the world than she had, — though not very much at that, — he had yet scarcely divined it as much as she had. He had no apprehension, or rather no conception, of the possibility of troubles. Life was a gay thing to him. To her it was a problem. She knew little, indeed, of the numerous practical, specific ills of existence. She would have done foolish things, not knowing their ill consequence nor the extent of the confusion that may follow unwise steps. But she seemed, as it were, to sniff complexity in the air, as one may detect a faint odor of burning before the outburst of a conflagration. The odor hung in the atmosphere, but she could not tell where the incendiary spark was. Yet she was not nervous, nor did she show fright, as birds and cattle do at the approach of a still distant storm, flying from it hurriedly and with cries; but stood still, awaiting that which might be coming. This prescience of tribulation was lacking in Archie. He showed its want in his laughing, unclouded face, his easy ways, in all he said. His horizon was clear.

It was after her curt behavior to him at the post-office, that Frances became somehow sensible of her greater strength and of a sudden prompting to be a protection to him; she had then resolved that when she saw him again she would treat him cordially.

In her peculiar way of making herself, in joke, an attacking party, she asked, "What did you come to our church for, and sit in the transept?"

As she said it, she turned upon Archie a face that was altogether smiling and friendly. It seemed impossible for her to express kindness in her face, if she expressed it there at all, without throwing all her heart into the act; so that her features appeared to show a great deal of interest.

"Why, how do you know, Miss Merley, that I am not always an attendant at your church, and that I don't always sit in the transept?" he retorted; "is n't this your first Sunday here?"

She bit her lip; and throwing the gates of confession wide open, contrary to the usual practice of maidens, she said, "I am caught, I admit; I took it for granted that you came for some other purpose than a religious one."

"I did," he answered.

There was a short silence.

"You ought not to do so," she finally said; "church is not the place for such things."

Archie felt a keen sensation of pleasure at the course the conversation was taking. The effect was such that words did not readily come to his lips.

The prolonged silence came soon to be a noticeable thing to both of them. Still neither of them broke it; who should break it, when they were both conscious that it was the silence of mutual liking?

Their faces, ruddy against the cold north blast, w not turned toward each other; yet each was awar the bright color in the other's cheeks, and each the occasional touch of their garments fluttering in wind. Perhaps this indirect communication made tl both breathe more quickly. They were mute, br in their muteness; they went on in their silence, - pregnant silence, ever growing in its unlisped con sions, confessions of the breath and not of words until they came to Mr. Bradbury's gate.

The nearness of the end of their walk seeme length to break the charm that had kept them both still. Frances turned upon her companion with same kind expression on her face, and said, in a ge reproving voice: "Why did you let me be so silly the pond the other day? Why did n't you let my h kerchief stay where it was, or get it in some o way?"

Archie laughed. "I did not think it would be gallant to do anything else."

"But it would have been more sensible and n manly." She was regarding him with a mixtur pleasure and reproof in her face. "It was not di fied," she continued, "in either of us; it was we She paused a moment; then she asked, "Did it you any harm? Did you catch cold?"

"No."

"What did you do that evening?"

"I did nothing in particular."

"I should think you would have been lonesome on such an evening, when friends usually get together."

He was silent. What was there to say? They had arrived at the doorstep. "Good-by," she said; "come and see me soon."

CHAPTER V.

A WALK IN THE SNOW.

WINTER, this year, did not fly over Marshton as was its wont, merely casting a shadow of its wing over the place in its flight; but, as if it had found a congenial resting-place and a convenient centre for its work, perched, as it were, and abode there. Its spirit went abroad, and the village and the country-side, as far as the eye could see, was whitened, and frost held sway over all. The running streams gurgled faintly under their ice coats. The snow squeaked under the sleigh-runners, and the network of the country roads tinkled with sleigh-bells. Many a night cold north-west blasts struck against the houses, rattling the windows and blinds, and swayed the gaunt trees, while the stars shone mellow and bright in the deep-blue sky. Then came seasons of still, frosty weather, when the mornings broke crisp and calm, and the early riser saw the smoke mounting, in a straight little rushing column, from one kitchen chimney after another, until each house was overhung by its own particular little cloud.

Bright did the villagers make the winter. The snow was cleared from the pond, and there was continuous

skating; there was coasting, and there were sleigh-rides. Many a moonlight night the music of shouts and laughter, mingled with that of sleigh-bells, could be heard from far away over the country-side. The peace of the earth and the cold made it seem as if the Spirit of Winter, rushing onward, had suddenly stopped here, catching some sound, and was standing listening, with every hillside stealthy and unmoving as he stood.

What he heard there in Marshton, it would be hard to say. Some excessive jocularity on the sleigh-rides? But that can be found anywhere. Some interesting love-dreams, flitting through youthful heads at night, — peering into the still chambers? Or was he looking hard right into the heart of miserable Marshton, judging it? We don't know. He hung around there for a month or two, any way; and some small matters got under headway in that time.

There was Archie Hiller; he was a young fellow, who had already become a general favorite with the Marshton folk. His cheery ways, pleasant manners, his refinement, and his handsome face made people like him. To Edward Salisbury the artist, and to Parks the grocery clerk, he was equally polite; and each of them would have said that he was a good fellow. It was so throughout the village. His scholars liked him. He knew how to be gentle and still to be a disciplinarian. There was no disorder in his school; and that was saying a good deal for a school of that kind, where it had not been an unusual thing for a farmer's lad,

trudging in every day to get his winter's schooling, if he thought he could whip the teacher should it come to a "wras'le," to shy an apple-core at him as he sat on the pedagogue's platform. It was to Archie's credit that no such occurrence had marred his sway over the high-school of Marshton; he exerted an influence that kept the boys tractable. The parents of his pupils in this way came to hold their share of liking for the schoolmaster. They did not all know him, perhaps, but they heard him spoken of as a nice young man; and they thought he must be, because their children said they liked him, and they seemed interested in their studies, and no deviltry was heard of as going on at the school-house. In short, peace appeared to have settled down unexpectedly over this school, as it had long ago settled down over the rest of Marshton. Yet Archie had truly told Frances that he had no very intimate friends, — not even college friends, and still less intimate friends among the Marshton people. None of them had his confidence. His heart was so sunny, that it seemed never to run across hours of sadness, when one wants to talk from the soul and may perchance suddenly turn a listener from an acquaintance into an abiding friend.

During the winter he saw much of Miss Merley, and was often at Mr. Bradbury's house of an evening. The first mutual liking of the two had not worn off with the progress of the winter. The magnetism — or whatever it was — of his presence, that had aroused her at the outset, was still a force with her. She liked to see him;

but their talk, when they were alone together, did not incline to the serious matters whose discussion can establish deep friendship. No real comparison of their minds was ever brought out. She was apt rather to play off some piece of coquetry on him, which only increased her attractiveness to him. The relation, on the whole, was a superficial one, in the sense that it did not draw upon the deeper powers of either of them, or rather that it did not even involve the question of what deep powers either of them possessed to draw upon. But there was an intensity about it. The youthful vitality of each made the effect of the sallies that were interchanged, and the coquetry that was indulged in, pungent. The personality of each was affected to the quick.

One Saturday afternoon he started off with her for a short walk. At the gate Frances halted. "I am tired of going to the village," she said.

From where they stood a wood-road for sleighs led up back of the house. "Let 's go up there," said Archie.

She turned and went with him. They went past the Bradbury mansion, and on up the ascent behind it to the verge of the woods. There they stopped and looked back. The sky was overcast, as if another snow-storm were brooding over the country. Below them was the house, rising above the dense growth of evergreens that had been planted behind it to ward off the north winds. On the hither side of

these the snow lay unbroken, except by the broad furrow of the road they had come. On either side of the field itself only the top rails of the fences and the heads of the posts showed above the snow; and here and there a drift had surmounted the whole structure and buried it from sight. In other spots the drifted snow, curving and curling about the fences, had been cut by the wind and hollowed into the graceful form of a ploughshare. Beyond the house the highway was so much depressed as to be invisible from where they stood; but off to the left there clustered the village, with an occasional moving figure or team to be seen, black against the white street. Beyond the highway and beyond the village the fenced fields rose again and retreated, and still retreated, — ever narrowing up the distant slope, with their spots of farmhouses and outbuildings and haystacks, — up to still higher ground where the woods began and where the tree-tops formed at last the minutely serrated horizon. All this opposite hillside seemed to be asleep for the winter, except for the little wisps of smoke that floated off from a chimney or two and lazily hung in the air, — interposing patches of bluish film against the landscape. Scarcely a sound was heard. Just at hand there was deep stillness; only from the village could be faintly heard the occasional shout of a boy at play, or the momentary jingle of a sleigh-bell.

"Don't you like it?" asked Frances, turning to him.

"Yes, I do; I like the woods too."

"Do you?" She drew down the corners of her mouth in mock surprise. "I will walk with you there if you want to."

The snow lay thick in the woods. It was a favorable winter for getting out firewood. There had been much chopping, and the ox-teams with their sleds had passed to and fro between the village and the woods so often as to turn their tracks into well-travelled ways. The wood-roads, which in summer-time were rough and useless, but picturesque enough, and serviceable to any one who wanted a quiet and shady ramble leading nowhere in particular, except to where the thrush gave out his metallic notes overhead and the wild-flowers cropped up underfoot, were now turned into a sort of highways, where the ox-whip cracked, and the oxen steamed in the wintry air.

The forest, indeed, was far from being the secluded retreat it was in the summer. Instead of a half-lighted region of deep recesses, known best to the partridges and squirrels and rabbits, it was now a much brighter spot and a place almost as much frequented as the open country roads. Fresh piles of cord-wood were scattered about, showing the recent presence of choppers; one could not go a quarter of a mile without hearing the sound of an axe, and the bare trunks and branches made the wood so open that one could see far into it, making it seem less mysterious as it was less dense.

They wound their way in and out among the trunks, following the curves of the road they had entered by. Other roads were continually crossing it at all sorts of angles. Before very long a chopper was met who was making the chips fly in a lively way as his axe cut into the trunk of a large tree. They stopped a few minutes to watch him as he handled his axe with skill and rapidly deepened the cut. His work was fascinating. Such vigor seemed to animate the swinging steel, and such accuracy of aim sent each blow just where it was most needed and would most tell toward the felling of the tree. Presently a quivering of the great trunk was perceptible, as if it shivered at its own impending ruin. Then the axeman stood off and looked up at the top; then he bade the two bystanders stand aside, and approaching the trunk he gave a few more blows. The top weaved to and fro, then leaned to one side, and then, with ever-increasing momentum, crashed its way to the earth. The bole snapped at the cutting, and the monster lay upon the ground. The chopper leaned on his axe and wiped his brow with his shirt-sleeve.

"That was worth seeing!" came from Frances under her breath, as a little tremor ran through her frame; and they turned and went on.

It seemed, at length, as if they were getting pretty far into the woods, and Frances suggested that they should sit down on a log that happened to be lying by the road, and rest. They cleaned the snow off, accordingly, and sat down. She pulled her coat close

around her neck and looked about her. The trees about them were tall and grew thickly. Their distant tops looked out on the light of day; within, there was a slight but pervading shadow, made by the interweaving of the countless naked branches and twigs far above. But this dull light came only from above. Below, the snow reflected a more cheerful whiteness. A few saplings straggled up here and there between the trees, and in the hollows there were clumps of evergreens; otherwise, only the tall, straight trunks of the full-grown trees obstructed the view; between these, where some chance aisle opened, one could see a long distance. The snow lay deep all around. It buried the ends of the lowest branches of the evergreens. One could only guess what lay hidden under it all. The last snow-fall had not as yet been shaken down from the trees by any wind, and it piled up in the crotches and along the branches, and bent the evergreen boughs down with its load. There was no sound but the faint axe-strokes of the wood-chopper they had left. The softened light, the silence, and the high roof were more impressive than the interior of a cathedral.

The two ramblers sat for a few minutes in enjoyment of the scene. Finally, the sound of the wood-chopper's axe was heard no more. He had evidently finished his day's work and gone home. Now the forest was still.

"How sound asleep all this wood is!" said Frances, at length. As she spoke, a rabbit came into view,

hopping along at a little distance. Bunny paused a moment, as if he had descried the figures of the two wanderers and was passing upon the question of their danger to him. They sat quite still. He seemed presently to have settled the matter to his satisfaction, and went on jumping about as if he were quite alone. He skipped along in a zigzag fashion, halting every now and then to cock his ears very upright, and sniff. Very likely he was foraging. His movements made no sound. Noiselessly he jumped out of the deep snow and descended into it, his little hind legs twinkling in the air. This seemed like a nice home for him, — this broad, quiet wood, with its boughs making him a shelter, and stocked, no doubt he knew where, with various good things for him to eat. And he seemed to be at home in his broad domain; familiar, doubtless, he was with all its trees by sight, knew how to find his way all over it, had his own well-worn run ways, and loved, as any wild animal may well love, the surroundings to which it perfectly fits, — this home where he was born and bred, and where he enjoyed his free life.

Some such thought as this, no doubt, was passing through Frances' mind as she watched the little creature's progress; for when, all at once, he came to a halt and busied himself about something in the snow, and then was suddenly jerked up with the springing up of a sapling, and hung dangling and kicking in the air, this sudden arrest of his innocent little travels gave her a shock.

"Oh, look at him!" she cried, starting to her feet.

"It was neat, was n't it?" responded Archie, admiring the working of the snare.

"What do you mean?" she cried, much flushed, and stamping her foot, while her eyes flashed. "Why don't you get him out?"

He was off like an arrow, as her thoughts suddenly became revealed to him. It took him but a few moments to reach the struggling creature, and a touch upon the snare set him free. He had only been caught by a shoulder, and he bounded off and was lost to view in a twinkling. Archie threw up his hands in token of triumph, and trotted back to the road. Frances' excitement had subsided, and she had a manner as if she were pluming herself after the ruffling little disturbance. "Don't be so stupid another time," she said; "I think it is time to go home now." She made a sheep's eye at him, as she said it; he did not say nay, and they trudged on homeward.

She, in her haste, went too fast. For as they neared the edge of the wood, in passing under the snow-laden bough of an evergreen, she did not stoop quite low enough, and her hat caught in a twig; she was brought to a standstill, and the bough upset its burden of snow on her head. Either this or the lapse of time seemed to have taken away her severity of humor toward her companion, for she burst out laughing. "Oh, do get me out!" she said, turning to him with an appealing look.

He loosened the branch from her hat, and whipped the snow off her head with his handkerchief. She seemed to be still amused at her plight, and stood patiently while he did so. But bits of the snow stuck in her hair. He began to dislodge them with his fingers. He was longer about it than was necessary. She did not hurry him. He rearranged her hair in little places where he had disturbed it. She stood still and was submissive. Then he pushed back behind her ears some locks that had run astray. He was slow about this too, and did it with needless particularity. But she only looked in his face, with more of a serious than a smiling look, and suffered him to do it. When it was done and there was no further occupation for his fingers about this self-imposed task, he still did not move away. For a few moments they stood facing each other, each gazing into the other's eyes, half in questioning, half in telling. Their faces were very close together. He laid his hands gently on her ruddy cheeks, as if he might be going to renew his services in gathering back the stray locks; but he held them there for barely an instant. Her face broke into a smile, and she said in a soft voice, "Come!" and slipping away, again went hurrying on.

Neither of them spoke at once, and presently they came out of the woods. They were facing the west, and at that moment the clouds over the distant hills broke away just enough to let the light of the setting sun stream over the field of snow that lay before them.

ırned the white breast of the hillside to gold, and
a mellow glare into their eyes. The western strips
louds became more and more rosy, and the bright-
spread on either hand along the horizon. It
ıed as if the sky and the land had broken into a
e; and to this young pair, as they stood there,
e was a kind promise in that smile to them.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. BRADBURY FINDS THE COURAGE AND A "NO."

"MISSUS BRADBURY, ma'am, would ye be kind enough to do me a favor this marnin'? Would ye be kind enough to give me a few minnuts? I wish to shpake to ye," appealed Bridget, in her most seductive manner, to Aunt Miranda, while she wiped her hands on her kitchen apron in preparation for the interview. "I wish to show ye something, ma'am," she continued, sidling up to her mistress and speaking with a drawl intended to be conciliatory.

Aunt Miranda began to be rather alarmed at this unusual manifestation on the part of her cook, who had, at her kindest moments, always been bluff and hearty. Her tone was a trifle more tremulous than ordinary, as she inquired what she might do for Bridget.

"Well, now, ma'am, would ye take the trouble to coom down in the cellar wid me fur a minnut, jist fur a minnut?" and Bridget cocked her head on one side like a bird, and hung on her mistress's answer with an exceedingly artificial look of complaisance.

"Certainly I will," replied Miss Bradbury, gathering firmness with her servant's continued appearance as a suppliant.

"I would n't trouble ye for the world, ma'am," apologized Bridget, as she led the way down the cellar stairs, "only ye know, ma'am, I was a bit un'asy, and I could n't well go to Mr. Bradbury, ma'am. Oh no, that would niver do. Oh, I could n't do that, ma'am, niver! Did ye iver see a cl'aner cellar than that, Missus Bradbury? Look at the flure of it, if you pl'ase, ma'am," she added, as she almost forgot to be mincing in her manner. "Do ye see iver a scrap of onything, onything on that flure, ma'am?" Bridget did not wait for an answer, but leading her mistress into the meat-cellar she continued: "Do ye see iver a bit of milk in this room, ma'am? Would ye oblige me, Missus Bradbury, and look very hard wid yer eyes and see could ye see the sign of a tint of milk inside of these four walls? Ye see nothing of it, do ye, ma'am? So much for the m'ate-cellar; and now would ye walk this way?" Bridget went on excitedly, brushing past Miranda, toward another door: "And look into this room; ye know yerself, ma'am, this is the milk-room, and would ye oblige me wid looking wid yer eyes, and see if you see iver a scrap of m'ate in thim four walls; ye can see yerself, ma'am, the shelves there is in it, every one a hangin' one, and not a bit on ony a one of thim but milk-pans." Miranda admitted the fact. "Now I 'm much obliged to ye, Missus Bradbury, for the inspiction; and ye know yerself, Missus Bradbury, it 's niver a bit different ony day from what ye see it now. And what do ye think, Missus Bradbury," asked

Bridget, in an abstracted way, as if putting a conundrum, "Mr. Bradbury would m'ane by sayin' the cellar was n't kept right and the milk tasted o' m'ate?"

"I am sure I don't know, Bridget," trembled Miranda; "did Mr. Bradbury say that?"

"Yes, he did, ma'am; he said it to meself only last night."

"You must be mistaken, Bridget; you misunderstood him."

"Ah, no, ma'am!" replied Bridget, resuming her natural hearty way. "How could I mishunderstand him when I was almost ag'in' his elbow? And I hooked meself up very smart and said, 'How could the milk taste o' m'ate when it was niver beside the m'ate?' and he says, 'Do ye always kape thim in siparate rooms?' 'And I do,' I says; and oh, ma'am, what do ye think Mr. Bradbury says to me then? He looks at me very hard and says, 'I know better,' and walks out into the shed. Oh, ma'am, thim hard words!" choked Bridget, beginning to weep and wiping her eyes with her apron; "no one was iver shpakin' to me that way before, ma'am; niver, niver. And then, ma'am, he came in from the shed and scoulded me about Tommy. I he'rd him givin' a kick at Tommy, and him rushin' out o' the door as if there was forty broomshticks after him; and he came in and he says, 'What do ye kape that cat in the shed for?' and I says, 'Is it Tommy ye m'ane, sir?' and he says, 'Yes, it is Tommy I m'ane,' and I says, 'Shure I don't

kape him there, sir, an' he just flicked in this minnut, sir; and it 's Harrigan, sir, will tell ye that Tommy kapes to the shtables;' and he goes off very stern-like, ma'am. But it 's Harrigan, ma'am, will tell yerself, too, that often 's the evenin' whin him and meself has sat on the binch by the well and Tommy a-purrin' betwane our feet, and whin I went in and shut the door Tommy would always be left out wid Harrigan; and ye know yerself, ma'am, wid yer own eyes, the cat is niver in the shed in the daytime. Now, Missus Bradbury," Bridget continued, having recovered from her weeping, "that is the whole of me story; I have not conc'aled one word from ye; but ye know yerself, ma'am, that the milk is niver put beside the m'ate."

With these words Bridget led the way back to the stairs, and Aunt Miranda ascended, much relieved to know the worst of Bridget's troubles, but much surprised withal at her brother's conduct; for Bridget had been their cook for ten years, and Luther had never had occasion to find fault with her before. Not many days passed, however, before she came upon the cause of his irritation.

It was a fortnight or so after this interview, on one of the early warm May days, that Miranda and her brother were sitting on the piazza, enjoying the first coming of summer weather. The piazza was broad, but the afternoon sun streaming in reached to their feet, bringing a warmth that was not ungrateful after the long frost of the winter. The heat had started

the budding trees, and they were now half clothed with foliage. The April showers a week or so before had turned the grass green.

The brother and sister were not in the habit of conversing much when they sat together. Miranda was not positive enough in the expression of her ideas to provoke him to conversation; and for her own part she had very little to volunteer apart from the housekeeping. After a long silence, Luther said, "I think I shall have to get Bartlett out with Dick and have this grass cut; it has come up pretty fast the last few days."

There was not a lawn about Marshton that was kept so green and smooth and well shaven as Uncle Luther's. His grass was now a good week ahead of any one else's.

"Yes," murmured Miranda, as she sewed away at the napkins she was hemming.

Silence followed. Luther puffed at his cigar vigorously. By and by he said: "Mirandy, I think I 'll have one of those new-fashioned flower-beds made down there, about in the middle of the lawn, — one of those arrangements with rows, everything in rows and all close together, made in some fancy shape, — a star, now; how do you think a star would look?"

"Well, brother, I don't know. I have seen such, and I suppose a star is as good as anything else."

"Yes, I think a star would look pretty good. Casilear, when he sent me his bill the other day, — bill for last season; old Casilear is n't in much of a hurry with

a good customer, — he sent me a book showing colored designs of these things." But Uncle Luther did not go into a description of the designs. He seemed to be only half interested in the subject, and dropped it with the remark, "I rather think a star would be as good as anything."

Another considerable silence followed. Luther's cigar was going fast; and he ran his hands up through his white hair, from time to time, as if he were inwardly conning some intricate matter. After a few minutes, however, he turned to Miranda, and gazing at her with a vacant look said, "The Houdan hen has come off with a brood."

"Yes," said Miranda, not looking up, and therefore not seeing her brother's vacant stare, which might have frightened her if she had seen it.

Luther renewed the violent puffing of his cigar, and finally broke the silence again: "Squire Hotchkiss's new black Spanish came off with a brood yesterday."

It seemed to Miranda that her brother was uncommonly small in his remarks to-day, and that he was going out of his way to bring up Squire Hotchkiss's fowls. But the reflection only led her to vary her usual "Yes" with an "Indeed, Luther!"

Uncle Luther fidgeted in his chair. His cigar was getting short, and he took another one from his pocket and lit it from the first. Miranda noticed the act, and with a slight tone of rebuke said, "You are smoking a great deal this afternoon, are n't you, Luther?"

To which Luther absently returned that he "did n't know."

"Where is Frances?" he asked abruptly.

"Gone off somewhere, I think," answered Miranda. "I think she drove out in the pony phaeton."

Luther got up and took one or two turns along the veranda. "Mirandy," he said, stopping before her and looking at her intently; but as she raised her eyes there was such a startled look in them at seeing her brother's gaze riveted on her so, that he did not finish his speech. He turned away, saying, "That pony is very slow somehow in coming on with the lame off foreleg; first it was the nigh one, and now it 's the off one."

He resumed his seat and endeavored to appear tranquil. Miranda was getting nervous, and glanced at her brother once or twice. He evidently noticed it, and at last, as if unable to stand this beating about the bush any longer, he brought his chair round with a slam, so as to face his sister squarely, and said emphatically, "Mirandy!"

His sister, thus confronted and addressed, was startled so that she dropped her needle and napkin both, and sat looking at her brother in a helpless way, as she might have looked if she had been suddenly confronted by a party of brigands.

"Mirandy," repeated Luther with continued force, his mind evidently made up for a dash, "I want you to do me a favor;" and he looked her steadfastly in the eye: "I want you to speak to Frances."

Miranda visibly trembled. "Luther!" she ejaculated in a frightened voice.

"I do," continued Luther, holding on hard to the back of his chair as he leaned slightly forward; "I want you to speak to her. I want you to speak to her about young Hillier."

"Luther!" again ejaculated Miranda, more upset than ever.

The truth was out now, and Luther relaxed his grasp of the chair and became more natural in his manner. He even went so far as to pick up Miranda's needle and napkin and replace them in her lap; but she took no notice of them, only sitting with her hands clasped, and her lip trembling as was her wont. Her brother no longer fixed his eyes upon her, but looked off into the distance as he went on.

"It is pretty plain to my mind that somebody ought to talk to Frances, and you are the one —"

"But I can't!" interrupted Miranda; "I could never do it in the world!"

"Mirandy, you just hear what I've got to say. Somebody has got to talk to her. If you don't, I must. But you are the natural one to do it. Frances is affectionate with you, and you can just tell her about it in a woman's way, and she'll do just whatever you say."

"Oh, Luther!" sighed Miranda.

"Mirandy, be sensible. We love Frances," — Luther paused a moment as his eyelashes suddenly became a trifle moist; "we love her, Mirandy," he continued,

hardening his voice, "and we must act for her good, and not mind ourselves nor what it costs us."

"Don't you think you could do it?" murmured Miranda, pleadingly.

"Now you heard what I just said, Sister. You can do it so she would take it all right. You know what to say; not too much, you know. You would put your arm around her and tell her about it; tell her you did n't want her to get too much interested in young Hillier, and — and she would think all the more of you for doing it."

"I don't mind that, Luther," ventured Miranda. "If I told her what I thought was right and what was best for her, I would have my return in knowing I had done my duty, whether she thought more or less of me for it; it is n't that. But I don't see how, Luther, — how I could ever — ever bring myself to say one word to Frances about it."

"But don't you think you ought to? Don't you think it is your duty?" persisted Luther, catching up the word "duty" as a good one for his case.

Miranda was brought to bay. Her brother had confronted her with a question which she had often put to herself in the quiet of her own meditation, but which she had never been able to answer. She had observed Archie's attention to Frances, and noted through the winter how it continued; and she was convinced that Frances did not dislike him. She was pleased to see her pleased. She was also prepossessed in favor of

Archie. He was so handsome and graceful and bright and frank that she could not help liking him; and it was a pretty sight, — the two sitting together, — Frances with her color and her light gold locks, and Archie with the same bright color and his curling brown hair, and both so full of life. It was a relation she could not bear to think of interrupting. Still, she could not help thinking that Frances was in some ways deeper than Archie; and she had her misgivings whether, if they were ever married, it might not turn out that she would help Archie more than he would help her. As for his being a school-teacher and having no money, — that was not merely something that Miranda did not weigh, — it did not even enter her mind. Taking the affair all in all, as she saw it, it had thus far proved to be something about which she could not make up her mind; she could not settle what her duty was. When Luther asked her this question, therefore, she was not ready with an answer. He did not hurry her. She retraced in her mind what musings had come to her from time to time on the subject; she fumbled the needle and napkin absent-mindedly; finally she put them and the other napkins together, and rose.

"Luther," she said in her trembling way, but decidedly, "I cannot do it;" and she stepped away in her tottering manner, half in fright and half in dignified retirement, through the low open window into the parlor, and was gone. Luther did not attempt to call her back; he had made all the appeal he could

consistently with his dignity, and now whiffed his weed in solemn thought.

Baffled in his attempt to secure Miranda as a monitory messenger to his niece, Luther was forced to consider the ways and means of delivering his message in person; for he was not a man to give up the pursuit of an object simply because it involved his doing something that was disagreeable to himself. He awaited only a convenient occasion.

Not many days elapsed before the opportunity came. On a chilly night of the changeable May, when fires blazed in the fireplaces, it chanced that he and Frances were sitting alone in the library. Miranda had retired as usual at an early hour. The library was the room, of all in the house, on which Luther had spent the most effort and money. It was large, insomuch that it almost seemed too large. At either end a wide mullion window, enclosing at its sill a comfortable settee for lounging, admitted a light that was mellowed by silk ecru shades and heavy curtains of Oriental stuff. A parquette floor of intricate pattern was overlaid in the centre with an immense rug which sank under one's tread like moss on springy ground. Smaller rugs were strewn here and there, and before the fireplace was outspread an enormous polar bear's skin. Other skins from animals of remote habitats embellished the apartment. The hide of a tiger enlivened the large rug on one side of the long centre-table, and that of a leopard on the other. A black bear's skin lay before each of the

window-seats. In this room one's thoughts ran from an African to a polar scene with an easy skip. A huge fireplace opened on the broad side of the room, and the breast of the chimney was overhung with oil-paintings from the mantel-piece to the ceiling. Along the walls of the whole room, bookcases of ebony were built, and were filled with rows of well-bound books with glittering backs. The whole space from the top of the bookcases to the fretted cove of the ceiling was filled with a collection of handsome and well-selected engravings. Overhead, the ceiling was elaborately frescoed in a somewhat florid style, after Luther's notion of having plenty of color there; but the work was well done by a master of the art. The design consisted of a group of figures, representing various aspects of mediæval learning, — a monk poring over an illuminated volume in a cell, an alchemist dabbling in chemicals, the figure of a Copernicus brooding in the midst of globes and charts, and a possible Erasmus inscribing something, — very likely a fling at the prelates; all large pictures, whose subjects had not been specifically ordered by Luther, but adopted by the artist himself, under his general orders, as giving a chance for depth of color, and as fitting the character of the room. Although it was an unusual style of decoration, it yet served its purpose well. As one's eyes wandered upward from a half-reclining posture in any one of the half-dozen easy-chairs, they rested upon venerable and ancient figures, deep in the work of the times to which

they belonged, pensive, ever motionless and silent, breathing learning down into the room from their calm distance, and leading one, as if by magic power, to the bookcases and to a burrowing into the worthy volumes there, — to a silent search for knowledge of man, his history, and of the world.

Frances had been infected thus with the spirit of the room, and had dipped into the books, day after day, for many an hour together. The reading, indeed, was not bad; for Luther had put himself into the hands of a leading New York publisher for the filling of his bookcases, and the big bills that had come in, and that he had cheerfully paid, were well represented by what the publisher had delivered to him. He was aware, in a general way, that he was getting an excellent selection. When he had got the books, however, he did not read them, and never had any intention of doing so. Benton's "Thirty Years in the United States Senate," the "Speeches of Daniel Webster," and a copy of the "Congressional Record," gave him all the reading he wanted.

On this particular evening Frances had been an hour or more over her book under the lamplight, and Luther had sat quietly in his arm-chair before the bright fire. She finally closed her book, and laying it on the table sat in the large library-chair, with her eyelids half down, dreamily looking at the fire. After a while her uncle said, "Come and sit in this chair, my child, near the fire;" pointing to a vacant chair near him.

They both sat in silence for some time. Finally, as a couple of logs broke with a crash, and a shower of sparks shot up, and a fresh blaze brightened the room and outshone the lamp, so that the shadows of the furniture went a-jigging on the wall, the mantel-piece danced crazily on the ceiling, the brasses of the fender sparkled, and even the gilt of the book-bindings in the bookcases became bright, — then Luther turned to his niece; and noticing, at the moment, the sheen of a plain gold ring she wore, he said, as if by way of opening a conversation, "The bright fire makes your ring shine, Frances."

"Yes," she said; and she began turning it round her finger. "That is a ring that Papa gave me a great while ago. He gave it to me on my birthday, when I was fourteen years old. It is only five or six years ago, but it seems a long time. I wore it on my third finger then; but now that one is so big I have had to move it to my little finger."

She held up her hand and gazed at the ring. Luther did not speak, but sat looking at it too. At length, when she laid her hand down again on the arm of the chair, he took it in his and held it.

"A chubby little hand it is," he said; "like Harry's."

She looked up at him and smiled. The old gentleman sat a long time, still holding her hand, before he spoke again. To tell the truth, there was much tenderness in his heart. Now that he was on the point of

imparting to her what was on his mind, her life all at once became very vivid to him. He looked back upon her childhood, to the time when he used to see her playing about the floor in her father's house. He remembered how she had grown up motherless, a seemingly lonesome little thing, to the time of her first consciousness that she had no mother. He dwelt on that part of her life where she and her father had been such good friends; and then he passed on to the time when her father too left her, — left her alone, to no one but him, Luther. The old gentleman felt a pity that such an amount of loneliness had come to be the lot of the little innocent thing as he remembered her in her long curls and short frocks; and he had an intense yearning to befriend her and to spare her all ill in the future that he possibly could. There was something pathetic, even to his unsentimental eye, this evening, in the reflective face and figure of this fair woman who had yet the world before her, — such of it as she had not been bereft of. He lifted his hand and wound his fingers through the short little waves of hair of a tawny hue that cropped out about her temple, as if he would lay them to rest; but they would not go. At length he dropped his hand across the arm of her chair. She laid hers in it.

As she sat there, she, in turn, seemed to enter into his life and to come to an understanding of what old age might be; how one might feel who had lived and passed through the innumerable cares and troubles that

go to make up a lifetime of activity. The accumulation, during those long years, of irremovable impressions upon the memory struck her as something which, in the mass, must sober the enjoyment of any life now, when one was old. He appeared to her to have passed on, by virtue of his many years, to a membership of that group in whose favor one who is younger may perhaps intercede with the world; as if the world must have become inclement again to the aged individual, as it was when he was a little child. She felt, in this quiet moment, a genuine emotion of sympathy with her uncle in his advanced years; and she had laid her hand in his as an expression of true friendliness.

"Yes," said Luther, as if concluding aloud a course of silent thinking, "you were left to me; all, — you, your fortune, your future. If I should be remiss in any way in looking out for you, Frances, I should n't rest in my grave when I got underground. Harry always trusted me. He always knew I would tell him the truth about everything, even if it was disagreeable."

It was going hard with Uncle Luther to bring himself to speak to his niece of what was weighing upon him. He was silent a few moments, and then went on: "If anything was to come up that I thought I ought to advise you on, even if the advice was to be disagreeable, no matter how much it pained me, I should, if I stopped a moment to think, — I am sure I should see his face before me appealing to me not to leave you alone, unguided."

"I know, Uncle, you could have only the best wishes for me; and it only makes one respect you to know that you could n't help speaking your honest mind."

She was only answering to her uncle's current of thought, without expecting that a chance for the application of her words was near; but it was a sincere answer. Luther understood it so, and it smoothed the road for his advance.

"No," he said, "I should not die in peace if I knew I had ever failed to act up to my convictions; I have n't done it yet, and I 'm pretty old to begin now." After a pause he continued: "Frances, there is something that I want to mention, something I want you should hear me about. It has been on my mind for some time; but it 's against my nature to interfere with young people's matters, and so I have n't said anything. I wanted to speak to you about young Mr. Hillier."

Uncle Luther drew a long breath.

"Hiller," mildly interposed Frances, "not Hillier."

"Ah! Hiller, is it? Did I say Hillier? Well, pardon me, Fanny, for my mistake. I wanted to say a word about him." Luther had withdrawn his hand from hers, and was nervously playing with the seal on his watch-chain, with his face to the fire. "You have seen a good deal of him," he went on after a pause, "and I want you should think whether it would n't be just as well not to see so much of him."

Frances' heart beat vehemently. "I should be glad to please you, Uncle," she said.

She stopped short. A picture had suddenly unfolded itself to her vision, — a picture in which she and her uncle stood apart. She felt it to be so true that she was unnerved. Hitherto there had been no difference between them. What she saw now was, that a difference did exist and that it was likely to go on existing. The prospect horrified her, filled her with a sort of terror. It was her first breach of peace with any one in the world; that it should be with such a good and kind friend as Uncle Luther, — it seemed as if she could not bear this; that it should be with a person to whom she was devoted, seemed intolerable.

"You will think about it?" said Luther, in a low voice, after a long pause.

"Yes, I will think about it," murmured Frances, scarcely knowing what she said. She arose and stood before the fire, with her hands clasped before her, irresolute; then she turned her back and walked the length of the room. She reached the window where the curtain had not been drawn, and looked out in an absent way. She was struggling to meet the question, to comprehend what it was that she had to decide; for the necessity of deciding seemed to press upon her. But her thoughts wandered; she could find no end of a thread to seize in the maze. She looked up at a star that was shining brightly; but it was only a star, — it suggested nothing. She heard the rustling of the young leaves on the shrubbery below, as they were moved by the breeze of the cool May night; but they were simply

leaves, — they had no relation to her. All the night without was vacant; it was nothing but the night. She seemed to be without any power of thinking.

Gradually, as she stood there, her mind sank to some sort of rest, and definite thoughts came to her. She did not query whether she loved Archie, nor how much she loved him, — whether enough to go against her uncle or not. That seemed rather aside from the question; it was a question rather of duty, of what was the highest course of conduct to follow. From this standpoint she considered whether it would not be base to turn Archie away, — there being no fault with him, — to save herself the pain of offending her uncle. She pondered what sort of stuff friendships and likings should be made of; and she could only find cowardice and insincerity in the act of throwing over a liking in order to avoid a pain. Such a principle of living seemed contemptible. She thought, in her intensity, that she would rather defy it and dare any consequences, no matter what, than live by such a rule.

But then, what about her uncle's pain — not her own — if she should displease him? Were not he and all his kindness to be considered? Ah, yes; considered. But what, then, should become of this, her passionate determination not to desert nor be cold to any one — to Archie Hiller — without cause? What honorableness of living can there be in such injustice? If the attack had come from the opposite quarter, and he had sought to estrange her from her uncle, — had all at

once proposed to her (the fancy brought a smile to her lips) to have nothing more to do with him, — she would have insisted just as much on preserving that attachment. The other attachment, whatever it was, seemed to her an innocent matter, and she could not see, in turn, why she should be untrue to it.

Her thinking all resulted in one thing, — she should ask her uncle why he objected to her seeing Archie. She walked back to the fire and stood erect before him.

"Uncle," said she, "why do you not wish me to see Mr. Hiller?"

"Sit down, sit down, Fanny," he returned. It annoyed him to be confronted so. "There, that is better. 'Why?' Because, my dear child, it is true that old heads are sometimes wiser than young ones. When people are of your age, their feelings sometimes become enlisted before they are aware of it."

Luther paused.

"Well?" queried Frances.

"I should dislike to have your feelings enlisted here, Fanny. If such a thing should happen, I don't think it would be much of a benefit to you."

"Why not, Uncle?"

"Because," continued Luther, warming up somewhat, — "because I don't think Mr. Hillier — "

"Hiller," interjected Frances.

"— Hiller," continued her uncle, "would be a good match for you. He has n't money. He is only a boy.

He has no profession but school-teaching, and does n't do that very well. I don't know what you can be thinking of, Fanny, with such an idea and such a question."

Frances was angry, — not angry with her uncle, but with what he said. Her train of thought, just gone through, came up before her. "What am I thinking of, Uncle? I am thinking" — she spoke with dignity — "of being a woman, first of all."

Uncle Luther was at a loss; he had not expected so much spirit. He did not understand his niece, nor the depth of the passionate feeling that she was capable of. He did not speak, and Frances moved away. As she was near the door, he said, "Well, Frances, promise me that you won't see him — I won't say, any more, but not so much."

She turned about, and after a moment said thoughtfully, "I can't promise, Uncle."

Quietly and gently as this was said, Luther was not prepared for it. It amounted to a refusal to obey. He had not, indeed, used a word nor a tone of command in his short talk with her; but authority was in his heart, and he knew very well that she understood it. It had not been his habit at any time in his life, nor was it now in his old age, to accept a nay from any one, where he thought he had a right to a yea. If he accepted it now, it would be a novelty to him. His sense of propriety could not endure it, and he became aroused.

"*Frances!*" he ejaculated in a deep voice, as he arose, while she still stood on the threshold.

She turned round and fully faced him; but she did not approach him, nor did she speak. She only held herself erect, a picture of defiance.

Luther surveyed her long; but she stood motionless and returned his gaze. The fire in his eye subsided little by little, but his face was still stern. She watched the change; she noted the old man's spirit fading away. Something of the penitence of the victor, of the one who has been harder than the other, came over her. Compassion seized her, at the sight of this old age, still hale and strong, bending, slowly bending to her obduracy. There came the start of tears and the impulse to run to him and throw her arms about his neck; but it was checked. A moment sufficed to bring her back to a calmer standpoint, whence she recognized that after all he must be still of the same mind as to the matter between them, and she could not give up her view on that. She halted, almost in the act of raising her hands and stepping forward. The check was painful. She longed to surmount the barrier, to go to her uncle and be at one with him; but it would not let her pass. As she still stood, harrowed but determined, the old gentleman said solemnly, in a low voice, "Frances, come and kiss me good-night."

She went to him. He bent forward to kiss her, and she received and returned the kiss without a word.

He, on his part, had become calm; but there was no retreat from his position. They were as much apart as ever. She turned and left the room.

As she entered her chamber in a forlorn and hopeless frame of mind, she found it lighted and Aunt Miranda there. The tremulous little lady scanned her face for a moment, and then impulsively stepped up to her and embraced her in her trembling arms, but she did not speak. There was a feeling of loyalty to Luther which kept her from the utterance of a word in dispute of his authority; but she clung nervously to her niece and pressed her hands. Frances was fast melting under her aunt's tenderness, and she felt her mastery over her feelings giving way. She pushed back a few gray locks that had escaped from the old lady's cap, and said, "Come, Aunty, you will catch cold here; there is no fire. Let me light you to your room;" and she took the lamp and led her aunt away.

Miranda submitted; but when they reached her room she took Frances by the hand and led her to a chair. "Sit down, dear; I need a little company." Then as she looked into the girl's face she saw tears on her cheeks, and took her own handkerchief and wiped them away. Frances looked up at her and smiled a little.

"I wish you would do my reading for me to-night, dear," continued Miranda; "my eyes are not very good."

She handed down a Bible from a shelf and gave it to Frances.

"Where shall I read?" she inquired, as she opened the book.

"Where the book-mark is, please," said Miranda, seating herself by the fire, with her back half turned upon her niece.

"It is at the fifth chapter of Matthew."

"Yes, that is right; read there, please."

Frances composed herself and began: "And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: and he opened his mouth and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Her voice faltered. These words, old before her time, were old to her now. Once they had been new, in the time of the innocence of her childhood. Irresistibly her mind went back to those early days of learning them, — went back from this heart-stirred present with its knowledge and conflict. "Oh!" was the cry of her heart, "if I could only be a child again!"

Aunt Miranda had shaded her face with her hand at the trembling of her niece's voice, and there she waited in quiet.

In a few moments the reader recovered herself, and went on: "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted."

Again her voice trembled. It seemed cruel to keep her at her task. But she courageously commanded herself anew, and went on, ere her aunt could have moved: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled."

She paused. Perhaps she felt the case her own. The tear-drops fell on the page before her, yet her voice was firm as she continued: "Blessed are the merciful" — but the words choked her, — "merciful," she repeated, in an attempt to go on; but it was vain; that was too touching a word. There was a brief pause, and then convulsive sob after sob escaped her; the book slipped from her grasp, and she buried her face in her hands, weeping violently.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SCHOOL-VISITORS' MEETING.

AMONG the newly leaved boughs of May the birds were not blither than Archie Hiller was, in going through the daily routine of his life; nor the summer brighter before them than his future was before him. What clouds may have sometimes passed over his world were as light as the scattered patches of fleece that floated through the May sky, — dissolving without a shower, without even darkening the day. Cares were not upon his mind. The little plagues of life did not irritate him.

He watched his scholars with a kind of gay interest, and felt simple delight at their progress; over any stupidity he smiled, — when he was alone. In the higher studies, in the Latin and Greek that he was working into the heads of the little plodding group of boys, he found genuine pleasure. The lines of Virgil and Homer, that were parsing to the lads, retained their poetry to him. As one sees in a real stream the reflection of one's face, so in their flow he found the counterpart of his own spirit. By contact with their refinement and grace, the gentleness and delicacy of

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his own composition were reinforced and, as it were, disclosed to him. Wholly without the force of any creative power himself, the breath of genius yet could not pass him unfelt; and to the influences of these antique creations, become, after a fashion, ethereal by the remoteness of their time, he was peculiarly sensitive. Living and moving among the homely scenes of a school-room and a village boarding-house, but observing all through them only their holiday side, his life was, after all, a kind of running stream of poetry between narrow banks. Although he was teaching school to earn a living, his living was the last thing he thought of. It need be no surprise, therefore, that he was taking no thought whatever, neither by way of suspicion nor conjecture, as to what possible thunderbolts the board of school-visitors might be forging for his destruction. Ever since Cáleb Warburton had given him friendly warning, it had lain in his mind that some squall or other was coming, that might temporarily becloud his career and possibly leave him adrift on the world. But that seemed to him of no great consequence. The world was wide and not altogether unfriendly.

To become readily hostile to anybody was not in his nature. He did not even incline to become inquisitive about the dissatisfaction found with him. That would be really going to war, — prowling about the enemy's encampment and spying out his plans. Nor did the thought of being unjustly accused arouse him to resent-

ment. Nor did the movement against him stir any coarse thought of resolving not to be beaten. If his employers did not like him, it was an episode; that was all. It was quite another matter, though, whether he deserved their dislike. But that was a question on which there was no debate, nor even a thought of debate, in his mind. He was clearly conscious that he was filling his post dutifully. With a clean conscience, he continued his peaceful administration; bearing about in his breast, indeed, the words that Caleb had spoken, but only as a slight and half-forgotten burden, imagining nothing and planning nothing.

Yet the board of school-visitors was undergoing considerable agitation. "Young Hillier" was a person whom Mr. Bradbury decidedly did not like. He could no more have liked him than he could have liked an opera-singer. All the poetry about Archie was no more than fiddle-playing to the old man; fiddle-playing was something he hated. It was not merely that he had no ear for music, and that music was disagreeable to his auditory nerves; but the genius of music itself was despicable to his mind, — "Cheap Italian trash!" he had been known to mutter to himself. Everything that savored of the character of music; everything, spiritually speaking, that had wings and did not creep on the earth, was distasteful to him, and held in the greater disesteem the less frequently it yielded to the force of gravity and came to a terrestrial footing. In other words, the practical affairs of life, — money-

getting, money-keeping, and the faithful discharge of a man's business obligations were, to him, not only the essence of a moral character and a high life, but, if a person had any other commanding objects of pursuit than these, that person was just so far belittling the true type of man. In Archie he instinctively felt the presence of those qualities which would never make a rich man of him. He found a certain playfulness of temper, a nonchalance, a coquetting with classic learning, against which the youth's quiet executive ability, in managing his school well, found no chance for a hearing. His estimate of the young schoolmaster was summed up in the appellation he had always used since the very first time he had seen him, — "Young Hillier." It is manifest that he was unfair, in that he gauged him, not as a schoolmaster, but as a business man, which Archie did not pretend to be, and which he was not drawing his pay for being; but that did not occur to him, and if it had, he would not have tarried over it. Nothing would have removed his prejudices.

It came about, then, that Mr. Bradbury, not deeming Mr. Hiller a proper type of man, conceived that he was unworthy to hold the place of teacher of the high-school of Marshton; and being a man of action, it would have been to any one who knew him only a question of time, when he should put his shoulder to the task of dislodging Mr. Hiller from his place. Now, Luther was circumspect and sagacious; he was not one of your conceited grandees who think they are going to

have their own way merely because they want it; he was a shrewd person, who took account of forces he had to encounter. The forces in this case were the remaining members of the board of school-visitors. In number they were five. There was, to start with, the new rector, Mr. E. Taylor Clerkenwell; then there was the minister of the Congregational Church, — an elderly person, who was not well known to Luther. Besides these two ecclesiastics there were Ebenezer Green, the miller, already mentioned in these pages; the respected Farmer Whipple, so called, his real name being Farimer but corrupted locally to Farmer; and Joshua Sanford, the leading grocer and the one notary-public of Marshton.

A unanimous agreement of the board adverse to Hiller was something that Luther did not think of for a moment; he had no notion of wasting his time on getting more than a bare majority. The grace of a unanimous vote he did not care a straw about, for he was a man who was always sure he was right, and he was indifferent to appearances as long as the right — his right — was done; he was strong enough to carry two dissenting votes on his back.

Of the rector he was tolerably sure; and yet Luther could dimly recall the mention at various times of Archie's having spent a long evening at the rectory, where Mr. Clerkenwell kept bachelor's hall, and the sight came to his mind painfully of the two often strolling, and even returning with muddy feet from long

walks, together. Nevertheless, after the first shock of the recollection of this intimacy as relating to the case in hand, Luther settled down into a shrewd state of very slight disturbance about the young rector. The old man had been a person of some influence in his day, and he was still for that matter; of so much influence, that divers characters had now and again seated themselves, as it were, parasitically upon his broad wings, — or manœuvred to do so, — for an easier flight through life, insomuch that Luther, who was not above the flattery of having men dependent on him, had afforded carriage of this sort more or less for the last half of his life; and had thereby come to know a thing or two about that class of men who incline to curry favor with the powerful rather than trust their chances in life to their own merits. It had occurred to Luther that the last man of this sort he had happened to meet with was Mr. Clerkenwell. He did not esteem Mr. Clerkenwell any the less for it, nor any the more; for the sycophantic lack of independence in that person, as in all others of his class, was about offset, to the old gentleman's mind, by the having so shrewd an eye to the main chance. Without any particular feeling on the subject, therefore, he quietly ranked Mr. Clerkenwell as a supporter through thick and thin.

Two more adherents were now required. With the other divine, the Rev. Mr. Steepler, Luther was conscious he had not the ghost of a chance, for there was rivalry between the two congregations. The Episcopal

was the richer, and that was a good deal; and for that Luther was largely responsible. He would have the church, as he would have everything else he was connected with, "in good shape;" and he had been so free with his money, and put the parish affairs in such very good shape, that Mr. Steepler could never quite shake hands with Mr. Bradbury, on account of the church, though personally he bore him no ill-will. Luther was too proud now to ask a favor of a man he had no business to ask one of; and he was, beside, very well assured in his own mind, that if he did ask it Mr. Steepler's jealousy would never allow him finally to grant it, though he might not decline offensively. He therefore classed Mr. Steepler on the other side.

Of the remaining three, Ebenezer Green, Farmer Whipple, and Joshua Sanford, it was Luther's business to secure two. Upon this problem he spent much cogitation. Whipple was an easy-going, upright man of sixty or so, living a mile or two out of the village on a good farm, — a man who had n't an enemy in the world. Ebenezer Green was testy. Joshua Sanford was a man who — and Luther chuckled to himself as the thought came into his head — could not possibly forego the honor of being privy to any prearranged scheme which should involve negotiation, secrecy, preparation, and a slightly dramatic result. "The old fool!" muttered Luther disrespectfully, in the quiet of his own library; "I shall have to see him. It won't take more than a minute to fix him; he 'll bite like a starving trout."

Without more ado, leaving the case of Messrs. Green and Whipple to be taken up later, he made his way to Sanford's grocery. It was at this grocery, by the way, that our friend Parks, of Wormsley boarding-house acquaintance, was clerk. It is but fair to that young man, who had his own ambitions, and to his employer Joshua Sanford, to remark, that the one was employed in, and the other proprietor of, the chief grocery in Marshton; a grocery set well in the midst of the village, about opposite the middle of the rather small-sized green; a grocery whence, under the tips of the trailing elm-sprays, you could see, over across the green, the high, white front door of the Congregational Church, and the two many-paned windows that flanked it, — one on either side, — and down behind that edifice the open front of the long shed where the farmers' teams were tied on a Sunday; a grocery in front of which, the chances were, at almost any time of day, you would find one or two farmers' wagons standing, with horses of untrimmed fetlocks and a rusty coat, as if but recently taken up from pasture, — mayhap it would be a motherly-eyed mare with a frisky young thing of a colt, in a pet at not being able to get its dinner under the thills, — with equally rusty harnesses; there would be under their feet well-defined holes which they had stamped, in ridding themselves of flies, and under their noses hitching-posts half consumed with a couple of years' nibbling; a grocery whose front platform would be very likely defiled with numerous peanut shells; whose atmosphere

inside the doors was redolent of brown sugar; where you could see Parks himself skipping nimbly about behind the counters; and where, if you lingered half an hour, you could not fail to become acquainted with the condition of every sort of crop that was growing for five miles around, and that, too, from the very best authority, the farmers themselves. Then if you walked on toward the rear of this establishment, you would have come upon an open side-door, where a canvas-topped, smartly painted wagon with a lively little horse attached, the property of the concern, would very likely have been found backed up to the door to receive its load for village distribution; and if, after having noted this evidence of prosperity, you had turned about, and your eye was sharp enough to penetrate the fly-stains and the dust on a glazed partition, you could have seen, spectacled and poring away over his modest account-books, with his jaw dropped in deep calculation, Joshua Sanford himself.

It was into this sanctum of the grocery that Mr. Bradbury passed when he came on the merciless errand of obtaining Mr. Sanford's support to the dismissal of Hiller. How bright the sun may be, how green the grass and foliage, how careless the birds, while we humans go about on our nefarious errands! If Nature were laying a plot that day, she would have blustered through the store in a fury; the doors would have slammed and the windows rattled, the darkness of twilight would have fallen, and Joshua Sanford would have

known there was something to pay. But when fair-surfaced Luther stepped into the store, everything went on as usual; and when he confronted the grocer, Mr. Sanford uncrossed his legs, folded up his spectacles, and looked as inviting as if some one had come to pay up all the bad debts. The fact was, Luther's calling in this way was something unusual; and it may possibly have crossed Mr. Sanford's mind that Mr. Bradbury, with all his riches, was going, somehow or other, in some fairy-land way, to make him a present of a house or a farm, for some great merit of his, hitherto unsuspected by himself. His imagination could have accommodated almost anything. But Luther did not unburden himself all at once. He inquired affably about trade, and gave the grocer some rather special information he had happened to get in the city about the price of sugar, spending some time at it; complimented the grocer on his prosperity, and praised the smartly painted wagon and the lively little horse.

"Well," he said finally, "this is all neither here nor there, Mr. Sanford; this is grocery talk, and I've come to see you on school business."

The possible house or farm vanished from Mr. Sanford's mind; but he only had the wish to be at the side of this representative of riches in whatever he might have in hand, and readily transferred himself to the lower plane that was suggested.

"Yes," he replied very responsively, "yes; it is pretty near time for our meeting, — pretty near time."

"Pretty near time it is," returned Luther; "and when we do hold it I shall have something to lay before the board, I *think;* and I should like to get your opinion on it, Mr. Sanford."

"Yes, yes," murmured the responsive Mr. Sanford.

"It is about this school-teacher we 've got in the high-school. I am not backward in saying, very plumply, that I don't think he is the man for the place."

Mr. Sanford was a trifle taken aback at this. He had a slumbering notion that Archie was a pretty good sort of a fellow, and so esteemed.

"He 's a man of no weight, no weight at all," continued Luther; "here he is going around as young and immature-looking as any school-boy; and beside that, he goes and gives a good part of his time every day to teaching some of these higher-toned boys Latin and Greek. Latin and Greek in a high-school! Who ever heard of such a thing, Mr. Sanford? I never did. There was n't any Latin and Greek in our high-school up in Vermont; not a bit of it. I don't think there ought to be any here." Luther waited for a sign of his auditor's mind on the subject.

The auditor's mind was in some innocent doubt. The auditor was not a man of much force, — at least outside of his own proper business of grocer; he knew that business pretty well, but outside of it, he was likely to take other people's ideas. Archie's youthful appearance had n't struck him as out of place before; but

now he came to think of it, he did n't look much like a school-teacher, that was a fact. As to Latin and Greek he did n't know much about them; it was something he had got along without, and perhaps they were a waste of time. He felt that Mr. Bradbury knew a good deal more about such things than he did, and if Mr. Bradbury felt decided about it, why he supposed it was no doubt right. Mr. Sanford was not mentally the man to query whether Mr. Bradbury might possibly be moved by prejudice in the matter, or to have noted that he was at all a man ever subject to prejudice; he was too innocent and simple to go to that depth.

As Luther observed that he had not made a bad impression, he continued: "I propose to move at the meeting that he be asked to resign at the end of this term, — that will be in a fortnight or so; and I think it is better to know pretty well where the board stands on that subject before it is formally brought up. There ought not to be any division in the board known outside about a teacher; for, in case he should stay, it would be bad, and I don't want to bring the matter up unless I know how it is going to turn. What do you say about it?"

"Well, Mr. Bradbury, I s'pose he 'd better go. There 's plenty of good teachers around, I s'pose; and we might as well be suited as not suited."

"Very well; now you must understand one thing," remarked Luther, clinching the nail he had driven;

"this must n't get out. You 'd better not say a word to any one about it, in my opinion."

"I see, I see; I shan't say anything," returned Mr. Sanford.

"If there should be any objection by other members, I will let you know. It won't do for us all to be talking about it beforehand. Now, Mr. Sanford, — sorry I interrupted you, sir, — I 'll bid you good-morning."

Mr. Sanford had assented to the scheme pretty easily; and Luther reckoned that the idea of secrecy would grow on his small mind, fond of mystery, by degrees. He took no thought of the better quality of that same small mind, — the simplicity of it, and of the possibility of his having abused it.

The interview with Joshua Sanford concluded Luther's active canvass. He felt sure of at least a tie. From that negative state of things, indeed, he would have been glad to extricate himself if he could without risk. But he knew not how to approach either Green or Whipple; and possessing the nerve to stand suspense, he deferred further moves until the actual meeting of the board.

In due time this meeting came; on one of the first June afternoons, — as it happened, a chilly and wet one. The conclave was held in a room that formed an addition to Joshua Sanford's store in its rear. This was the room where the grocer performed his notarial functions whenever called upon. It was entered from

the store by a glazed door; two windows, beside, looked into it from the store, — it having been added to the main building as an afterthought, without disturbing the original structure. These several windows were screened by shades, so that one in the store might perhaps hear but not see what went on in this back office. The room itself was dingy and unprovided with furniture, chairs having to be brought in from the store when the occasion demanded seats. On a narrow mantel-shelf was a notarial seal, an inkstand, and an inky penholder. The eaves-gutter outside tilted so much that the lower end crossed the upper part of one of the windows, and on this particular afternoon a monotonous drop, drop, drop, from the June drizzle splashed into some little pool outside; across the driveway under a shed some weather-bound fowls in sluggish postures were drowsing away their unemployed afternoon.

Farmer Whipple was the last one to arrive, dripping with the rain, but with a clean-shaven face, — save the scattering gray whiskers on his hale cheek, — a bright eye, and a manly, open greeting for each one of his brethren on the board. The meeting was opened by Luther, who, by common request, acted as chairman. Presently, when other business had been discharged, he proceeded to lay the matter in his mind before the board; and after his remarks, Brother Sanford made the requisite motion, which was duly seconded by Mr. Clerkenwell. Affairs seemed to be rushing on with

great momentum to the desired end. Here were evidently three out of the six visitors agreed at the outset on the proposition; was it likely that Ebenezer Green and Farmer Whipple would at this late day both make a stand on a matter which might not be supposed to have any deep personal interest to them? Both of these individuals, it must be said, looked rather astonished. The rapidity of movement put them off their balance. The Congregational minister, however, was not in the least surprised, if one could judge from his face; the compressed lips, hollow cheeks, shaggy eyebrows, and steady, expressionless eyes showed no change; he held his head erect, and was motionless in his chair as before, — an excellent representation of taciturnity produced by uncongenial surroundings. In the midst of the silence, Mr. Bradbury asked if there were any remarks to the motion. No one answering, he was about to put the question, when Ebenezer Green suddenly got up.

"What is this here motion, Mr. Chairman?" he inquired as if he had just awaked.

It should be explained, that, while on the father's side Ebenezer Green was descended from the local line that had always owned and worked the old grist-mill, he came on his mother's side from horse-jockey stock, a lineage as much addicted to horse-flesh as his paternal line had been to the grist-grinding. Ebenezer had thus inherited an eminently horsey mind; and while he never dreamed — such was his depth of root in the

milling business — of pulling out of that occupation and changing off to horses, yet the workings of his mind sprang, in great part, from the standpoint of the jockey. Among other things, Archie had always impressed him, for a man, much as the very finest colt of a whole county would have impressed him for a sample of horse-flesh. He admired him because he was so handsome, — because, as one might say of a colt, he had such a fine coat, delicate skin, nice limbs, and neat joints; and he would have nodded satisfaction as he thought of his clear eye and his graceful carriage. That was all of Archie that would have been perceptible to Ebenezer's eye, — unless it was his indications of a good temper; but he was just as certain to be devoted and true to the schoolmaster on these grounds, as another man might have been on account of his mental or moral worth.

Ebenezer was hesitating in his speech, — a fact which always seemed to lend weight to his words. As he stammered out his question, "What is this here motion, Mr. Chairman?" the attention of all the members was closely fixed upon him. "Do I understand that it is the object of this here motion to remove Mr. Hiller from his incumbency?" Ebenezer used larger words in meeting than he did out of it.

Mr. Bradbury signified by a nod of his head that it was.

The speaker drew a long breath and surveyed the group with a troubled countenance. "If that is so,"

he finally resumed, "if we are a-goin' to chuck this young chap overboard, what I want to know is, what we 're a-goin' to do it for." Mr. Green paused, but no one spoke. "*I* say, he 's as nice a young chap as there is in this here town, an' as there has been in this here town in a long time. He 's a very handsome lad." Mr. Green paused again, apparently gathering fuel for a fresh start. At length he turned toward the chairman, and began shaking his forefinger at him preparatory to an address. "I tell you, Mr. Chairman, you hain't been as long in this here town as I hev; and I tell you, sir, I hev seen the time when there was such rows in that there school-house,—I hev seen the time, sir, when that there school-house was so lively, that it had to be shet up;—for no reason in the world but jest because the schoolmarster could n't keep order; when the farmers' boys was a-heavin' apple-cores and hickory nuts so darned thick at the teacher's head, that he could n't set on to the platform!" The speaker paused for breath. "Whoever," he continued, "hears nowadays of heavin' apple-cores at Mr. Hiller?" and Ebenezer deliberately scanned, one by one, the faces of his audience. "No one!" he resumed triumphantly; "on the contrary, gentlemen, Mr. Hiller, as I hear, is the recipient of presents of apples, the best that these here farms produce," waving his arm abroad, "in token of the esteem of his pupils. That is what I call a change; and I don't understand the object of this here motion."

Mr. Green sat down. The members looked at one another. Finally Joshua Sanford spoke up: "It ain't so much the order; it is the Latin and Greek."

Mr. Sanford's manner was timid, and his voice sounded weak beside Mr. Green's robust and measured oratory; besides, Ebenezer's frame was always somewhat imposing when he stood up and gesticulated.

"What Latin and Greek?" he now demanded, turning disputatiously upon the grocer.

"It ain't right," continued Mr. Sanford, dodging Eben's glance and addressing the meeting generally, as if avoiding a personal discussion with the miller, "that when the *people* pay his salary he should take so much time in teaching Latin and Greek. We never had a teacher before who did anything of that kind."

"I have n't heard," suggested Mr. Whipple, "that any other studies have been neglected for that; my youngest boy and girl have done very well this winter."

Ebenezer Green felt strengthened by this reinforcement. He arose again, and turning toward Mr. Sanford addressed him: "What do you know, Joshua Sanford, about Latin and Greek, I 'd like to know?" and he glared at Mr. Sanford. No response came. "If the schoolmarster," he continued, turning to the others, "can teach Latin and Greek, it strikes me" (his mind reverting to horse-flesh) "that we air a-gittin' a speedy animal at a low figger!" But Ebenezer's blood was up; Sanford's mention of Latin and Greek was a putting on of airs that he could not get over. He put

his arms akimbo, and by way of peroration turned again to the grocer, and said, "I'll bet you, Mr. Sanford, that you don't know half as much about Latin and Greek as you do about mixin' sugar and sand!" and with this irrelevant charge, he sat down and eyed the grocer truculently.

It was an unworthy attack on his adversary. Joshua Sanford was incapable of committing the offence mentioned; and the chairman, to keep his fellow-townsmen to the business in hand, interposed and asked if he should not put the question. The meeting was agreeable; and the vote, which was taken by ballot, was, as announced by the chairman, a tie.

Now came Luther's grand stroke, — long premeditated, but held in secret in his own breast.

Five members of the board were astonished beyond measure, when the chairman declared that as there seemed to be a difference of opinion in the board on this matter, he should prefer not to remain a member of it any longer, and would therefore tender his resignation. There was a prolonged silence. By all, except by Mr. Steepler and Mr. Green, it was felt that they had come into an awkward predicament. Everybody would know of the resignation; it would get out that there was a quarrel in the board, and the school would perhaps suffer. To Mr. Whipple's mind it also seemed that in such a state of things the present teacher was little likely to stay, any way; and he penetrated the matter far enough to conclude, that Mr. Bradbury had

a grudge of some kind against Hiller that he was not likely to get rid of; and that, considering all things, it might be best, though it went against his grain, to let the teacher go. To do justice to Luther's foresight, it is fair to say that he had long ago calculated on this very view being taken by Mr. Whipple at this stage of the proceedings. He had further calculated, that some one would be likely to regret his resignation enough to propose another ballot on the matter, and that the motion would then be carried by Mr. Whipple's vote. It turned out about as he had expected. Mr. Clerkenwell proposed a second ballot. It was taken, and there were four votes for Archie's dismissal to two for his retention. Farmer Whipple, it may be safely assumed, had turned the scale in the interest of peace.

Ebenezer sat in profound thought, his round eyes wide open in a study. When he comprehended at last what had been done, he muttered to himself, "Well! if this here ain't a queer piece of business!" and took his disgusted departure.

When they had all gone, the grocer sat alone in the little vacated room, twirling his thumbs and absorbed in thought. The clerks went busily to and fro in the store outside, the water dropped and dropped from the eaves-trough in front of the window, the fowls under the shed opposite looked more sluggish than ever; but Joshua heeded none of these things. He was looking right through the shed, at something or other that was very far away. At last he got up and walked to the

window and drummed on the panes absently. "Yes," he said to himself at length, "I am sorry, on the whole, I did it. I guess it was a mistake." With that, he drew out his spectacles, and putting them on returned to his store to attend to the business that he understood better than school-board politics.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW ARCHIBALD HILLER SAID GOOD-BY.

THERE came no repentance to Frances' heart for the stand she had taken with her uncle. Moments indeed did come, when she had a passionate longing to bury her head on his breast and be at one with him again. It was distracting to be at any sort of odds with one who had only love for her. A sensation of disbarment from the good side of the world overtook her every now and then, when she seemed to herself to be a culprit, an offender against the established righteousness of things. Those were bitter moments, and all the more bitter, because there was no one to whom she could go in confidence and unburden herself, — not even to Miranda; it seemed underhanded to go to her, Luther's sister. She fell back, in an unconscious sort of way, on the memory of her father. He could have understood her case better. His miniature still stood on her mantel-piece. How often she looked at it tearfully! If those kind eyes had only life! If the lips could only speak! If the dearest friend of all were at her side! No. From the vain appeal she could only turn away to the living world; and there — what

was there there that was bright but the gentle, cheerful nature of Archie Hiller himself? To that she gravitated as a kind of home.

It was a bright June morning when he came to bid her good-by. School was done, and he was going away. It was his intention to bid her good-by. There was no thought of resisting Luther Bradbury's dislike of him. He understood what had been done at the school-board meeting, and accepted it with a Heigh-ho! and a sigh. Then it was over. And over, too, — as he thought, — his companionship with Frances Merley. With his inborn hopefulness, he thought he could bid her good-by and go back into the world where he had been before he saw her. To cleave to her, — what was he, a penniless lad? — to take her away from her home, to promote an estrangement between her and her worthy guardian, — undoubtedly worthy! He knew that if Mr. Bradbury did not like him for a schoolmaster to the Marshton children he could hardly like him as a husband for his ward. No; that would not be kind to Frances, to persist. The way was plain. She would soon forget him.

In this apparent clearness of mind he sought her out. But she was not at home the morning he called. It was a disappointment. But he was at leisure. He strolled down the road until he came to the spot where the tangled highway to the mill turned off. It could have been reached by a side path across the Bradbury lawn and then over a stile; and he fancied that Frances

might have gone that way for a morning walk. So he turned into the mill-road.

He had not gone far, but a little way past the stile, when he saw Miss Merley ahead of him in a broad-brimmed hat with flying blue ribbons, in among the wild-rose bushes picking the fresh flowers that they bore. There were so many blossoms that she and they and the greenery together made a bright bunch of delicate colors, quite fitting in with the clear blue sky overhead and the freshness of the cool June air. She was still reaching out after the roses, when his feet on the velvety grass brought him alongside unheard; she started, at his stopping close beside her.

"You almost frightened me," she said, laughing.

There was nothing but laughter in that morning air; roses, sky, and all, laughing.

"I am not so formidable, am I?" he asked.

"More formidable than roses."

"But not so many thorns."

She stopped her picking for a moment, and turned her face to him. "You are a thorn," she said. There was a touch of reproof in her voice.

"A fast disappearing one," he rejoined. "I came to bid you good-by."

She turned upon him inquiringly.

"I have been to the house," he explained. "This is a chance meeting. Perhaps you will accept it as a call, and receive me here as a wayfarer. I am one." He smiled as he said it.

She replied, indifferently: "Yes, it would be fitting, I think, to give a wayfarer a peripatetic reception. When did you become one?"

"Since my dismissal."

"Ah! you have become quite a public character. I did not think you could become of so much interest to the village."

"If other people make me so —"

"Yes, you shine by a reflected light, undoubtedly; you are a puppet. The showman pulls the string, and you jump up and down to the amusement of the audience. Do you like it?"

"I don't know," he replied, laughing, but still not taking her question as a joke. "A schoolmaster is a servant, you know, — hired and can be dismissed; that is a part of it."

"Have you no sense of injustice, then?"

"Yes; a mild one."

"You are not angry? you don't resent it?"

"I am not angry," he said; "I might say, loftily, 'I am superior to it.' I have a notion that I taught the school right."

"And you rest on that? That is sufficient satisfaction?"

"Yes; you look for knocks, you know, in the world."

"And you have got one."

"Yes."

"I am sorry for you." She said it in a gentler tone than she had been using.

That was the first shot into Archie's fortress. It went through an embrasure and knocked a gun off its carriage. Several men were carried off, used up. In this crippled condition he pursued his walk by her side down the road.

They came to the bridge that spanned the mill-stream after the water had done its duty by the grinding-stones. The contents of the sluice, coming out from under the mill in a solemn sort of way, as if all the heyday and youth had been churned and smashed out of it by the wheel, returned in a slinking kind of manner to the bosom of its parent water that had come down directly over the dam or leaked through it — any way to get down; and there, under the bridge, the commingled parent and child warbled their way along comfortably enough. It was a wooden bridge that hung above the stream, with a rail at each side where lovers might lean and look down upon the never-ceasing babble and upon the wild, brier-grown, steep banks, and, above that, at the dam itself, with its jets of silver water spurting through the logs and the colorless film racing down the apron; at the white-birch saplings, too, growing at one end, whose tops did not reach far above the dike, and whose lower branches, always wet with the spray and mist of the waterfall, were ever waving to and fro with the current of air that the falling water brought down. Lovers might linger long here on the bridge and hear nothing but the plash and gurgle, the voice of birds near at hand in

some bush, the drone of a passing insect, and, mayhap, a half-dozen times through the day, the rumbling of the mill as it ground. Everything here was suggestive of peace, of relations undisturbed, unbroken. If one were to fall in with the humor of the place, it would seem incongruous that lovers should ever get up and go away from one another, at least here. As it was, this pair lingered in silence for a while by the rail and imbibed the subtle influence of the spot.

At length they went on. They could have gone on farther down the road; but that would have made a rather long walk, and instead they turned into the wagon-track, not too much worn, that led, by windings and tilts among the birch bushes, to the broad doorway of the mill, where Ebenezer Green received his sacks and delivered them. As they came within view of this door, there stood Green himself, in his powdery clothes and hat, leaning against the door-post, waiting for grist.

He was an honest-looking figure as he stood there. The mill, once prosperous and a necessity to the neighborhood before flour was shipped from Rochester and Minneapolis to Marshton in barrels, was a little antiquated now as a source of income. For three generations it had been in the Green family; and Ebenezer, with little invention for a new career, had stuck to this old family stay, despite its commercial decrepitude. A jealousy even had developed itself in him with regard to this structure. It had been reno-

vated, all but its oak frame, three or four times, with new sidings and new shingles, here and there a patch at a time, until it had changed as often as the Green generations had; the continuous oak frame resembling, perhaps, the Green backbone which remained unchanged through all the generations.

Here was a place of great stanchness, — this place where the society of Ebenezer and his mill flourished. There were no fancy, fickle movements here. Ebenezer was as sturdy as he looked. As the couple drew near, he lifted his hat to Miss Merley, whose figure was not unknown to him in her ramblings about the lanes; and to Archie he broke into verbal salute. "I ain't seen you sence the meetin', Mr. Hiller," he said; "when it was thought best to give you your walkin' papers. It wan't any doin' of mine. I guess you know that a'ready."

The schoolmaster winced under Ebenezer's allusion to that subject. It was a disagreeable thing; it was past, and he wished it to be past. Nevertheless, he cast a bright enough look up at Green, as he said, "Thank you, Mr. Green; I understood that."

"I wanted to say that. I wanted you should know it," he replied. "I voted for you, I spoke for you; and what I 'm in favor of I back up. I did n't see no cause for your goin', and I don't now."

"You will get somebody quite as good," said Archie, with a laugh; "there are as good fish in the sea, you know."

"I know, I know," replied Ebenezer; "but that ain't the p'int. When you 've got a fish that 's satisfactory to you and that eats well, I don't see no use in swappin'. Ther 's bad fish in the sea too; and if you git a good one you may jes' as well stan' by him an' be content. Well, it 's done now; I hope you ain't goin' to become a stranger around here."

"I think I am."

"Well, well," replied Green, slowly, "if you be, if you air goin' away, here 's my hand, and I hope you 'll prosper." The miller gave the youth's more slender hand a hearty grip, — such a grip as he might have raised or lowered the gates of the sluice with. "Good-by to you."

The couple passed on, and Ebenezer returned to the dark interior of his mill. A few steps farther down the lane, a great broad oak sent its horizontal limbs reaching far and wide; and some of them shot just over the mill roof and swept the shingles with their leaves, while up around its top the robins carolled. There was a cool shade here under it, — too cool for a fresh June morning. But a little farther on, the roadway dwindling to a couple of ruts and a central hoof-path, ran on beside a stone-wall of old lichen-grown boulders, where chipmunks liked to frisk. Here, where the scraggy boughs of a forsaken apple-tree in the pasture threw a partial shade over the wall, and where the stones, tumbled down, gave seats, the couple stopped and sat down.

The unchanging, time-worn aspect of the mill and its surroundings was not conducive to a parting that should make a change in their lives. Eben's sturdy words, too, had the effect, if any, of making these two spirits somewhat combative against the circumstances that should send them adrift from each other. Besides, any parting at all was amiss on this bright summer morning when everything was just coming into bearing, and Nature was full of youth and promise.

But few words were spoken between them. Sitting upon one boulder, Frances picked the petals dreamily off her fresh roses, one by one, until only one rose was left; to that she spared its life. On the other, Archie sat, with his head back against the wall, his hands clasped behind his crunched straw hat, and his eyes off beyond the peak of the mill somewhere. But he leaned forward after a little while, and watched the denuded rose-stems as silently as she. The air became breathless; there was scarcely a murmur in it. An inquisitive little bird came hopping along the apple-bough right overhead, and eyed curiously these human creatures; it chirped a little and then hopped back again. The buzz of a passing bumble-bee stirred the air for a moment; then he was away with a bang, and Nature was in a hush once more, waiting, waiting — for what?

"Why should it be?" he thought; "why should I go at variance to all things?"

This was the time to say good-by; not this very

minute, but in a few minutes. He began to think how he should feel when it came to that last minute, that last word, that "good-by," — taking Frances Merley out of his sight forever. She was with him now, right by his side, so bright, pretty, and true. That was much better; that was right. Words crept to his lips, — not the good-by words. All Nature was in hush for him. But some weight hung on them to keep them back in his heart; the last minute was not yet come; there was time yet. But Nature, tired of waiting, took breath; a breeze fluttered the leaves overhead; the inquisitive little bird flitted away with a cry; and just then the mill began to rumble, — some one had brought grist. The enchantment of the silence and stillness was broken. Then words came to Archie's lips. "I came to say good-by," he remarked, looking into her face with a quizzical smile.

She looked at him with a solemn face: it was simply unexpressive; it might have meant indifference. Without saying anything she stuck her one remaining rose in his button-hole, and walked away.

He hastily got up and joined her. They sauntered back, without a word, the way they had come. When they came to the bridge again, she stopped and leaned on the rail as before and looked down at the water. It seemed a long time that they stood there.

At length Archie spoke, but only in a musing way: "Do you remember the day when we were skating up there?"

She did not look up nor answer him.

"When you gave me the ducking?" he persisted.

"That was a long time ago, was n't it?" she replied.

"Only a few months."

"So it was. It was such a trifle that I had quite forgotten when it did happen."

"You had not forgotten it!" said he, turning upon her with reproof in his voice.

She looked up at him a moment, and then resumed her posture, — watching the eddying water as it swirled under the bridge. But she said, as she did so, "It would be as well to have forgotten it, perhaps."

"I do not want to forget it, for my part," he responded.

Again they became silent. The water whirled on beneath them; the birch branches swayed on in their unceasing movement under the dam; the mill ground and ground away; the water fell, and fell, and fell over the dam, and the unending mist of its spray arose and floated away, and ever floated away. Again it seemed as if nothing here were ever to end, — nothing but the communion of these two little lives on the bridge; they were to break apart and go each its own way, — and after these two hearts were gone, and had entered upon their respective ways, everything would go on just the same; it would only be their happy communion that would cease.

It was too sweet to give up. Somehow or other it happened, as they stood there, that Archie's hand

touched hers as they hung side by side over the rail. Nobody was responsible for it; it only happened so. There seemed to be a magnetism in the touch; the hands, once together, did not separate.

"I don't want to go away and leave you," he said.

She looked up and smiled at him, her eyes soft with some sudden, mysterious dew, and a tremor ran through her frame.

"I don't think I will," he added.

He took her hand in his and held it. It was trembling.

There was inward tumult. Any resolve that there might have been in the early morning was cast aside now. She was the end of all things. He bent his face close to hers and whispered, "I love you, dear." Her figure quivered a little more violently, and a tear dropped down to mingle with the waters of the brook below. But she did not move. Then she lifted up her face, smiling, though the tears were in her eyes; and looking steadfastly at him she clasped in return the hand that held hers.

After all, this was more than an ordinary confession and acceptance of love. With him, it was a giving up of judgment to feeling; with her, it was a following of the great law of affection to the end of a final rupture with her uncle.

It was done. The birds in the neighboring bush seemed to know it; for they instantly became merrier.

The brook below sang a new song; the mill grui bled forth a kind of jollity. The swaying birch seem to nod and say it was sending congratulations to thei Yes; they two were in keeping now with all the peac ful place about them. How short a step it was th had taken them to that peace!

They left the bridge and walked, like children, hai in hand, until they came back to the rose-bushes ai the stile; and on the stile they sat down. At leng Frances said, smiling at her lover, "Don't you thi I have complied very well with my uncle's wish not see you any more?"

"Did he wish that?" said Archie, thrusting l tongue in his cheek.

"Certainly."

"He will never give up?"

"Of course not," said she.

"What then?"

"Very well; what then?" she replied.

"I don't know. What do you say to getting m ried?" He laughed, asking it almost trivially.

"What do *you* say to it?" she queried.

"No, it would n't do. I did n't think of that."

"Did n't think of what?"

"Money."

"I have money."

"I know; and everybody else knows it."

"How much do you care what everybody kno about me?"

"I should be a pretty fellow to marry you without any myself, and you having plenty. No, I could n't do that."

"Have n't you any?"

"Not much; enough to last about three months."

She laughed. "How funny! this is rather interesting. And at the end of three months, if we were married, what then?"

"Yes; what then?" echoed he.

"We should have to work, should n't we?"

"We?" ejaculated Archie.

"Yes; I should like that. I want to do something. I don't like to live doing nothing; it is very stale."

"Frances! Are you beside yourself?"

"No."

"Don't be foolish. Think."

"I do think. Be still! — once for all."

Archie obeyed and meditated.

"How much do you think we could earn?" he asked at last.

"Enough to keep us alive."

"Would that satisfy you?" asked he, in a tone that suggested it would not.

"Yes; as long as I was with you," she answered in a low voice.

Archie squeezed her hand. Then he meditated again. "Would you agree not to use your own money, — the income from your property, I mean?"

"Yes, of course; I don't care a fig about the property. Having property is n't living. I should like to live a little."

"Then you really mean that you would like to go into it that way? I can get admitted to the bar pretty soon, but you know young lawyers don't make much."

"Oh, dear me! how exasperating you are! Of course I should like it."

"You are not joking?"

"No, no, no; I am not."

Archie's face was very sober. He was going over in his mind the alternative to this sort of marriage. It would be waiting, long waiting, for Frances, under a roof where she would be, on account of her uncle's feeling, in a very uncomfortable, not to say intolerable, position. At the same time, he considered that if they did get married now, and he were to accept the use of any of her income, it would only increase her uncle's aversion to him, and be the more uncomfortable for his wife. It seemed as if the only course was to cast in their lot together and work out a living in their own way, after all.

"Just think," said she at this point in the train of his reflections, "how cosy it would be! Do you think it would all be a burden to you?"

He looked at her a moment and then caught her in his arms.

When Frances emerged from them and had

smoothed her ruffled feathers, she said: "Let us think of it over night; I must go home now. Come here to-morrow at this time. I am rather attracted to this stile and bridge and road since a few minutes ago; and I should be pleased to see you here again."

CHAPTER IX.

GREEK MEETS GREEK.

WHEN Frances left Archie she went into the house and dreamed; but there was a world outside, and by and by she saw it. The gardener was out there with a lawn-mower trimming spots about the shrubs that had been skipped; the sun fell upon his brown neck as he stooped at his work; the machine clicked busily and the little spears of grass flew; the shrubs were fresh and green, and some of them were blooming. It seemed such a simple life, — this of the gardener's, — to be in the sunshine, working over the grass, with no concern beyond these green and blooming things under his hand. This patient life of toil, — how enviable it seemed to this recently engaged young lady, who stood face to face with a clashing future!

An opportunity presenting itself that evening for Frances to inform her uncle of what had happened, she availed herself of it. Again it was in the gorgeous library — the scene of their former interview — that she was to have her meeting. Again, although it was a June evening, there was a fire on the broad hearth; but it was a smouldering, inert fire, just equal to the June

chill. A hopeless foreboding came over her as she sat there in expectancy of Mr. Bradbury's coming. Though she had been in this house scarce a year, nay, little more than half of that time, she had become wonted to it. The excessive decoration of this very room, which had shocked and rather bewildered her at first by the strange juxtaposition of its varied furniture, had come to be familiar. It had been so much of a retreat to her, that finally, the same objects always giving the same impressions, a relationship seemed to have cropped up between them and her; and the thought of her coming severance from them now gave her a feeling of homesickness. Oh, if only she were going to remain on good terms with all this household, with the quiet life it led; if even this furniture, this accustomed chair, were only something that she was not going to break off relation with; if this fireplace were only going on lighting up its grimy sides of a blustering evening for her, as it had all this winter through; if the stillness of this high room, with its solemn, pictured ceiling, were only going to remain an accessible atmosphere to her! It was not so much regret at merely leaving them; it was a dread that they were to become forbidden resorts to her, — things that she was going to leave for good.

Yes, who shall venture to say that the Romans were not right, after all? — that Penates did not come out from their hiding-places upon the hearth as she sat there this evening, and with their tiny forms express

lamentation among themselves at the impending disturbance of this household over which they presided? Ah! dear sprites ye, whatever ye be, that tie us to a particular fireside, that make friends to us of the hearth-surroundings among which we have sat! Blessed are ye, that ye string a tender chord across our hearts, even though the coming years shall breathe sad music out of it! Faithful sprites that aye, abiding here, beckon us back from our wanderings to the ruddy light of the hearth whereon ye stand, to the fellowship of our former days! Keep ye well those that abide with you still, that they be there against our return!

It was with a quickly beating heart that Frances, buried in her reverie of regret, heard her uncle's heavy tread approaching along the hall.

"Well," he said, as he stopped at the threshold, "everything was so still down here that I thought I was alone. Dreaming are you, my child, in this dull light? Let us see if we can't make it more cheerful;" and he proceeded to light a large lamp on the study-table.

"Let me do it," she said, starting up quickly; she wanted to do something for him. She took the lamp-lighter from his hand, and putting it to the coals did the slight task.

"That is better; that is decidedly better. That makes any one see and think clearer, both; that brushes the cobwebs away, and perhaps the seriousness

of your face too," he said, smiling, as he saw her sober expression.

"Do I look serious?" she asked, forcing her face into a smile that quickly passed away. "To tell you the truth, Uncle," she continued after a moment's pause, "I am a trifle serious."

"What is the matter?" he inquired.

"I am afraid I have done something that will displease you."

"Oh! I don't believe you have done anything so very bad; I don't think it is in your nature to go about grieving people."

Frances looked very solemn. Uncle Luther had taken a newspaper from the table and seated himself as if he was expecting to read after he had had a little chat with his niece.

"I dread to tell you," she said in a despairing tone, thinking rather of her own frame of mind than of what her uncle had been saying.

"Bless me!" he said in a bantering way; "is it so dreadful, Frances?"

There was, indeed, but one thing, besides losing a ring or something of that kind, that Luther could think of as likely to be a dreadful thing for her to tell him, and that was something or other — he could not define to himself what — about Archie Hiller. Anything of that sort, however, was so unpleasant a matter that he resolutely kept it out of his thoughts, as he had all along since their disagreeable interview; he could

make a desperate kind of fun, then, of her lugubrious look and the dreadfulness of her offence.

"Ah, but it is no joke, Uncle," she answered, shaking her head. "You must prepare yourself to be very much displeased."

She was so earnest, that he at last grew a little serious himself. "Well, I am ready," he said, with an inward bracing of himself.

"Do you remember what you told me, — that you did not wish me to know Archie Hiller any better?"

"Yes." Luther's newspaper slipped down to the floor.

"Well, I am engaged to him!" By an uncontrollable impulse she started to her feet in a fit of terror; and she stood there, poised as if to run, regarding her uncle with fright in her face. Uncle Luther also started from his chair, and with his tall form proudly drawn up, gazed down upon her sternly. So they stood, facing each other, while the moments flew by.

"Frances," the old man said, in a deep and tremulous voice, "I did not expect this."

She took it that he meant she had been misleading him, and she answered firmly: "Uncle, I have not been dishonest with you. I told you I could not promise."

The old gentleman slowly nodded his head in assent: "Yes, yes, you told me that. I remember that. I did not mean that you had been disingenuous; but I am surprised."

There was another silence. At length, after a deep breath, he went on, as if he had made an effort and overcome something: "I am surprised, because the very thing has happened that I dreaded would happen. I dreaded it so much, that I put it out of my mind and would not think of it; until it came to seem to me as something that could not, that would not, happen. It was so bad, that I could not believe it would come."

Frances was silent a moment. Then she said earnestly, "Are you sure, Uncle, that you do not estimate Mr. Hiller wrongly?"

"My child," he returned impatiently, walking up and down before the fire, "you must have some faith in me on that point. I am a better judge of men than you are."

"Are you sure," she said timorously, seeking a plane of conciliation, — "are you sure that women are not sometimes better judges of men than men are?"

He replied hardly: "Frances, you are talking idly. How is a girl like you to judge a man?"

"I think I can judge Mr. Hiller somewhat. I don't think he is a bad man."

"Bad man? No. There is n't enough in him to be bad. A baby can't be bad. The worst it can do is to get cross and squall, but it can't be bad."

Frances colored. She would have flamed out in a fury if she had not controlled herself with all her might. As it was, she tried only to remonstrate mildly. "I don't think you do him justice." But in an instant she

broke out impetuously: "Don't let us talk about it. I don't like to talk about it."

"But why not talk about it? What he is, is the very essence of the whole matter. Do you think I would have taken the pains to have him put out of the school, as I did, unless there was a good reason for it?"

It was on her tongue to say that every one did not agree with her uncle as to the fitness of the removal. She knew there was Mr. Green, for one; and doubtless there must be others in the village, for she was sure that Archie was generally liked. But it seemed to her to be wasting breath and temper to talk on in this way. Her uncle had his view; and if he could not see good in Archie, she despaired of being able to show it to him; it was very disagreeable to her, besides, to hear him abused. She simply said, "We shall probably never both view him in the same light."

Luther faintly smiled. "There is the woman again; she won't be convinced."

"Neither will the man," retorted Frances.

"No; that is very true, — nor the man, either; never!" said Luther, emphatically.

She sank back in her chair, and let her hands fall listlessly, — a picture of perplexity.

Luther still kept pacing the floor, with his hands behind him, and his head bent in thought. After a long time he turned and asked, "When did you become engaged?"

"This morning," replied Frances.

"You have n't had a long experience in that state, then," he remarked ironically.

"Not very long," she replied, coaxing him with a smile. "Let me see; six, seven, eight, nine," — glancing at the clock, — "nine hours and a half."

Luther did not join in her smile. He seemed preoccupied with his thoughts. "That is a very short time," he said. "I take it for granted you won't break it off now, immediately; suppose you agree to let it stay just as it is for — not less than a year, and see how you feel at the end of that time."

"And in the mean time what?" she asked.

"In the mean time, — why, what do folks usually do in the mean time?"

"See each other, I suppose. But," she continued, after a pause, "I don't understand how I could see him very well. You don't like him, and you would n't want him to come here; and he would not want to come, I am sure, knowing that you don't like him; and — "

"What else?"

"And I don't know that I would like to live so, — live here, when I knew he was n't liked here."

That was a great step to take. Her uncle surveyed her calmly and long. "She won't live," he thought, "with people who don't like him; she won't live with me if I don't like him — him, young Hillier; she sets him before me." But she looked at him steadily. The

old man's heart began to soften. "For all the world, Frances," he said, with a glance of admiration, "you are just like Harry. If he liked anybody, there was no mistaking it."

"Did you object to that in him?" she inquired quickly.

"No; by George, no! He was a brick."

"Then I am a brick to that extent?" she asked, her face relaxing into a melancholy smile.

"I liked your father every way, Frances, and" — his voice becoming decidedly unsteady — "I like you just as much." But he seemed to brace himself up, and began striding up and down again, as if no other sign of weakness should escape him.

Frances said, in a softer voice: "Why can't we be friends about this? It would take so little to make us so."

"So much, you mean," answered Luther, stoutly.

"How do you mean 'much'?"

"Merely that I should be false to my own judgment in being so. You can't call that 'little,' can you?"

"No, sir; but change your judgment."

"Impossible, my girl."

"I don't like to get married against your will."

"But you will have to, Frances, if you marry him."

"It is hard to serve two masters," she said, with a sigh.

"Very," was the laconic response.

Luther had halted in his restless walking to and fro, and stood with his back to the fire, his head still bowed in thought. The lamplight cast unwonted and heavy shadows on his countenance as he held his head thus, and made his face look even stronger than it usually did. Frances watched the labor of the old man dully. Her own resources seemed exhausted, and she waited for him to speak.. At last he said, without looking up, as if still studying: "There is one thing that would be — I do not say will be, I say *would* be — a redeeming feature. *If* you married him, there would be money enough on your side to support you and him both. I have no idea he could support you."

Uncle Luther did not intend to be offensive. He was merely uttering, in his abstraction, the fact and the probability that was in his mind, without considering the effect upon his niece's feelings.

She became angry at his words, and said quickly, and with something of a sneer in her tone, "Uncle, will you please devote my income, after my marriage, to some other purpose than either his support or mine?"

"What do you mean?" he asked, looking up in astonishment.

"I mean," she replied, "that we are able to take care of ourselves, without any money of mine. Mr. Hiller would not accept a penny of it, and neither will I use a penny of it. We will support ourselves."

"We?" ejaculated Luther, — "we? It is n't *he*,

then? You both of you admit the fact that he can't do it! A fine husband that is! — a fine man that is, to ask you to marry him before he can support you, to ask you to marry him on the condition that you shall make your own living! I never heard of such impudence."

"It is not impudence," broke in Frances; "it is honor. He is too proud to live on my money. I love him, and I would rather live with him and work for my living than be without him. I proposed that part of it, and not he. You accuse him unjustly."

"I don't care who proposed it," he answered; "the man is responsible in such things, and he is to blame for it, if it ever comes to pass, — which, God forbid!"

"It seems impossible for you to see him in a right light."

"Yes, it is," he muttered. He was walking about the room with quick, nervous strides. His feelings seemed to rise within him. "I shall never give my consent to such an arrangement," he said determinedly, — "never."

There was a long pause. These words, "I shall never give my consent, — never," repeated themselves over and over again to Frances. She was hardening herself to meet them. It did not seem possible to avoid them. At last she summoned her courage to ask, "Do you forbid my marrying him?"

Luther looked at her. She returned his gaze. He dropped his eyes and resumed his walk, and walked

back and forth a long time. At last he stopped before her, and spoke slowly and with great deliberation. "Frances," he said, "I do not forbid you to marry Mr. Hiller. If I followed my feelings alone, I should forbid you, and I should use every effort to prevent the marriage. But I cannot follow my feelings; I must sink my pride, my own self-will. I will not command you to do, or not to do, anything. I will only say this, and say it strongly, — I disapprove of such a marriage. I cannot treat you like a child, and forbid you. It would be treating you, a grown woman as you are, with indignity. It would be falling back on my technical legal right. I do not believe in it." He paused, and then went on. "What I wish you would do is to wait, — to wait a year. But I know what you will say, what you have said. You will not want to stay in a house that he is either excluded from, or feels himself excluded from; and I will be very frank, and I will say that I cannot find fault with you for not wanting to." Luther's voice trembled slightly. "You are like — you are like Harry; you are a chip of the old block," he went on, hardening up and even smiling a little. "It is a decent feeling, and I won't, I can't, ask you to violate it. I don't want you forced away from my house because you could not see there the friends you choose. Yet, if you waited, one of those two things would have to happen, — you would have to go without seeing him, or else see him somewhere else. What is your mind about it?"

It would have been so much easier for her to answer, if he had plainly forbidden her, if he had not confronted her with a mixture of the reasonable and unreasonable in his attitude. His forbearance and candor, in a measure, disarmed her. She could do nothing now under cover of a pet. She must meet his calmness with some calm resolution of her own, adopted in cool thought. In her quandary she could finally only fall back on the already accomplished, — on her expression to Archie, that she was ready to marry him at once. There was nothing stable but that in her field of view, and she clung to it. "I will marry him, sir."

Luther said nothing for a few moments. He continued his walk, and then said, with no trace of softness in his voice: "You understand, Frances, if that is your determination, that I can have nothing to do with him. I won't give you away to him in church, and I won't see him."

Her only reply was, "I can't be half-hearted to him."

To that he made no response. Very likely he did not know exactly what she meant. She arose; perhaps he could appreciate what was in her mind, and pity her? She stepped up to him and said in a low voice, while her eyes looked earnestly into his, "Can't you receive him?"

"No!" and Luther, of the strong prejudice and iron will, shook his head.

It was a momentous answer to her, but she took it.

She put her arms around his neck and hung there. When she lifted her face, there were traces of tears on it. Her arms were trembling. In silence she drew down the old man's head and kissed him. "Then you must not expect me to be here," she said.

There was a moment's pause. He could have changed it all, if he would; but he did not. She left him quietly and went out of the room.

CHAPTER X.

YOUNG LAWYERS ARE NOT IN DEMAND.

THE fascination of possessing a woman's love was too much of a force upon Archie's light nature to put him in any other mood than one of ready enterprise; and when he met Frances the next morning, it was only to renew, with an eagerness unimpeded by doubts, his proposition for a very speedy marriage. Frances was equally whirled away from any mood of deliberation by the quickness of her affection, and by the fact that her uncle's attitude had only cleared the way for impetuosity.

In view of Mr. Clerkenwell's action at the meeting of the school-visitors, — which had come to Archie's ears through the medium of Parks, he having overheard more or less of the debate of the conclave and supplied the missing links of its action by judicious inquiry here and there, — Archie would have wished that they should be married by some one else. But Frances was determined to carry off the marriage as one which she considered worthy of herself, and was therefore unwilling that the ceremony should be celebrated in any other than a regular way, in her own church and by her own

rector. On the very next day the wedding took place, with the young rector officiating. Scarcely anybody from the village was there. Aunt Miranda attended, of course; and Mr. Salisbury, having been called upon for the purpose, gave the bride away in due form. That gentleman, indeed, was nothing loath to do this turn for the young people. When he had heard of Archie's enforced retirement from the school, he was wroth; and meeting Mr. Bradbury in the street, with honest indignation demanded of him what he had turned Archie out for. "Damn it!" he said, "why did n't you tell me you objected to his teaching my boys Latin and Greek? I would have stopped it;" and without giving the surprised old gentleman a chance to answer, he had stalked off in a fume, twirling his stick as he went. It was a satisfaction to him now to fill the place that Uncle Luther declined to occupy. Caleb Warburton — with the exception of one or two stray passers-by who looked in to see why the church was open — was the only other witness of the ceremony. He walked in quietly, with the same fading but not yet wholly faded coat, the same absent mien, the same emotionless face, and, ensconced in the end of a remote pew, gravely waited there until the service was over and all the rest had passed out; and then returned to the Wormsley house and his usual seclusion.

There was dearth in the Bradbury mansion after Frances had gone. Luther had found it necessary to be in New York on the day of the wedding, and only

returned in time for his late dinner; by which time the places of Archie and Frances in Marshton knew them no more.

It was a dismal dinner. Awkward moments of silence came, and Miranda's voice was at times in more of a quiver than it should have been.

In the evening it was a dreary domicile. The dwelling had become, as it were, haunted. There had crept into the house — not entering boldly by any door, but stealing in, through the cracks and crevices that the March winds creep in through, and with a chill worse than theirs — two ghosts, that pervaded the house and dogged the footsteps of its inmates; the ghost of absence, and the ghost that, with finger on lips, forbade the absence to be touched upon, — these two mates, roaming side by side through the mansion, were forever brushing the garments of its remaining human occupants, were forever coming and whispering in their ears as they sat: "She is gone, she is gone! But, hush! do not speak!"

For a few months Miranda was occasionally in receipt of a letter from Frances. They were open, kindly epistles, telling how she lived and what was going on outwardly in her own surroundings, and closing with "love to all." The receipt of the letters was usually mentioned in Luther's hearing, but he never made any response by word or look. Miranda only acted as a means of communicating to the old man that his ward still existed; but nothing more.

When she went away, Miranda, far from making an ado, had been quite erect for her, and composed withal. Who knows what blight of a long-past, unfulfilled love may have been really the cause of the withering that had come upon her life, and made her so different from her positive brother? — so keenly to her hurt, that she, although usually unstrung, had the wonderful strength to stand up firmly and, with joy instead of tears in her eye, give her niece a farewell kiss and a blessing, and bid her be of good courage? Dear old soul! Where Frances' heart might have drooped in the moment of parting, and indeed at other moments, she did a world of good in breathing into her a notion of strength that did not spring from any obstinacy or defiance, — a strength that came of loving and knowing that she was loved.

Meantime Frances was taking, with a brave enough reception, the life that her choice was giving her. When they first dropped into New York, before the June had yet begun to be very warm, with their little hoard of cash, — he with a very few hundred dollars of savings, and she with the slight balance of a savings-bank account which had been active while she was here at school, — they had frugally cast about for a cheap boarding-place, where the honeymoon might be passed and their plans for money-making put into a practical form. They selected one of the old-fashioned houses down on Second Avenue; and here, with summer rates prevailing, they found agreeable quarters on a second-

story front, which they thought their purse would stand. A large room with door-casings and mantel-piece carved after the style of a generation back, and a black-painted, brick fireplace, with its flat, olden-time grate, for a parlor, and a little hall-room opening from it, for a bedroom, made up their tenement. A very cosy nest it was, too, for the bright-faced pair to start their life in. Here, on this side of the broad street, was a row, somewhat broken, it is true, of trees, — maples and lindens and ailantus; making a range of foliage that was inhabited by a throng of busy, chattering sparrows. Here, in the afternoon, the sun — its rays intercepted in a straggling, patchy fashion by one of the trees — favored their apartment with a cheery light, mellowing the tone to a cooler gold just about the time when Archie, returning from his pursuit of such crumbs of comfort and of money as the great city might afford him, found his wife waiting for him with a kiss.

Looking out of her windows at the birds on the sidewalk, Frances, fervent with the sentiment of the joint life, could not help thinking of the likeness between their own case and that of the feathery little bipeds. "A place to live in and crumbs to eat, is your life," she thought, "and so is ours; and so much happiness and spirit behind it all!" Indeed, the world seemed to her to be concentrated into one little point of love, — a sort of microscopic entity, that yet had relations with the stars, or even comprehended the universe. The little idiosyncrasies of the boarding-house mistress did

not affect her; the annoyances and discomforts that cropped out here and there from the management of the house and the usages of its occupants, did not disturb her. Her world was out of the orbit of such things.

Archie, meantime, had found a place down-town, where he could keep himself busy during the day. He could write a better hand than most men; and the law-firm of Drumm & Grabham, gentlemen with whom he had some sort of an acquaintance, took him into their office on pay of ten dollars a week. Here he copied, ran errands, looked up law cases in the reports, helped in searching titles, and did the fifty things that come in the way of a young clerk in a New York lawyer's office. What little time he had to himself he used in reading up for his examination that was to come on in October. This reading was not very interesting, as it consisted mostly of posting up on practice. But the new life, with its change from village school-teaching, had a zest for him; and he was, in truth, a merry bird, with Frances at one end of his daily line of travel, and his law work at the other.

They had two or three invitations out to dinner, from one and another of Frances' friends; but the season was advancing, and most of the summer runaways had gone off. All of her friends whom Archie did meet were delighted with his good looks and good spirits, and were inclined to admire his wife's courage in standing out for so prepossessing a choice. But when these

approvals fell on her ears, they affected only indifferently one who had started out by acting for herself, regardless of anybody's opinion. When they dined at home, — which was decidedly the rule, — they would stroll out after dinner, and saunter about Stuyvesant Square, to get a fresh breath from its greenery. This summer season was well to be remembered, in which their first adventurous entrance was made into New York, — in the daytime the bright June sky and the glaring streets; and in the warm evenings the dusky park; and later, as they sat in their room, the shuffle of the feet on the dry pavement coming up through the open windows.

When the hot weather came on, however, they both felt the need of an airing; and by pondering the various advertisements of "country board" in the daily papers, and by dint of considerable correspondence, they finally hit upon a spot out among the New Jersey hills, that promised them a modest but comfortable summer home. It was a boarding-house, — a liberally proportioned mansion that had seen better days, whose capaciousness may have ruined its owner, but was likely, in turn, to fill the purse of the enterprising woman of business from the city who had hired it. Their own particular quarters were among the most unpretentious and the least expensive in the house, — somewhere up in a third story; a room that might possibly have done service as a billiard-room in its day, with a mansard roof over it, and a couple of windows, one to the east,

where a view could have been had of the sun rising over the Westchester hills, and the other to the south, looking right into the top of an elm-tree, and down through it to the lawn below, which the broad branches covered with a checkered shade in the morning. Here again there were more birds, — robins instead of sparrows, that made the elm a lively thing with their flights and calls; and down below, the grass was flecked wellnigh all day long with the bright garments of playing children, from whom many a merry shout arose to the open attic window above. These children after a while turned to good account; for Frances, after a circumspect view of the situation, offered her services, for a stipend, to the parents as a sort of governess for them; and, her calculation not having been wrong, she was installed in that office. For a portion of the day, now, their attic bedroom was turned into a little school-room, where the youngsters, seated on a row of chairs, were duly instructed in their primitive studies. This occupation turned a pretty little penny into the couple's exchequer; and what with Archie's spending little or nothing in town for his luncheon (and coming home half starved, it must be confessed), their finances seemed to be well in hand, — at least as far as their regular expenses went. But Archie had a very bad habit of bringing home to her tempting baskets of fruit, whose allurements, as he passed them, set out in rows on his way to the ferry, he could not resist. Frances at length chid him for this extravagance, no-

ticing that he seldom benefited himself from these gifts; and he promised reform. But when the peach season came in, he proved utterly uncontrollable, and every day or so presented her with the most blooming specimens of the market.

One day he finally drew down upon himself a solemn lecture when he handed her a package which proved to be a very fine etching. "The fact is, Frances," he said, "I could n't help it. I saw it in a window, and it struck my eye exactly, and I was sure you would like it; and it will come in very well some day when we go to housekeeping." She gave him an impulsive hug and kiss; but at the same time there was just a tear in her eye which did not arise from gratitude. As the summer wore on, too, and their treasury had become visibly lower, Archie astonished her, after going through some protracted figuring, by his announcement of what it cost him for cigars. "Good gracious, Frances!" he exclaimed, "hear this;" and he read off his calculation. She smiled, but said nothing. "That is too much for cigars," he added. Nevertheless his smoking did not diminish. A pipe, indeed, was brought into use for a few days; but it was finally left undisturbed on the shelf. Frances never referred to it; nor did she ask him at all about his prospects at Messrs. Drumm & Grabham's office. She had a notion that when he had anything to tell her, he would tell it; and that it would only irritate him to ask, if there was nothing to be told in return.

Archie kept some law books at these country quarters for the purpose of reading in the evening, and he made many resolves to get through them. But he was so tired when he got home, and the insects made such an ado sputtering about his lamp and his head that it was up-hill work. It was a great deal easier to sit out on the porch, away from the heating lamplight, and smoke his after-dinner cigar with the ladies in peace; with the ladies I say advisedly, for he found more refinement in them than he did in the society of the three or four brokers and merchants who were the heads of the several families quartered in the house, and who talked common-place stuff; and besides he liked to be with Frances.

When the cool weather of September came, they packed up their traps and returned to the old place in Second Avenue, but not to their former rooms. These were now held at a price beyond their pocket, and they went up to the third story back, where, indeed, they were comfortable enough in a small way. They had again, not infrequently, invitations out to dinner or for an evening, and mixed enough with the society world — in a modest fashion, as their means would permit — not to feel lonesome.

This sort of evening life away from home was in strange contrast to the usual daily routine. One friend of Frances, who seemed to divine or to have been told the true situation of affairs, and who had a mind to step in and do something, — one Miss Frost, or

"Molly" Frost, as her circle chose to call her, — had conceived the plan of Frances' doing sewing; and to that end had gone the round of her acquaintances to get for her the making of babies' and children's dresses and other garments. Her canvass, along with that of Frances herself, was so successful that work soon came in fast enough to keep the young wife busy all day. She was deft with her needle, and as pleased as possible to get this work. It would have been more to her liking, perhaps, to teach; and she had applied to her old preceptress for a place in her school. But every post was filled; and as she did not feel herself competent to take pupils in music or any art work, this fancy sewing was highly acceptable. There was no social fall in it, either. Much of the work came from her own acquaintances; they admired her for accommodating herself to Archie's pennilessness in his start in life, and she held her own as well as if she was spending a hundred thousand a year.

This chance for industry on her part came the more timely, as Archie, during the autumn, lost his clerkship. Mr. Grabham, of Messrs. Drumm & Grabham, having a son who had been expelled from college within three weeks after his entrance, and the father thinking it best to set him to work in his office on pay, Archie had been required to give up his stipendiary post. Being now a member of the bar, however, he was offered a desk in Drumm & Grabham's office on condition of his transacting all his business under their

name and sharing the proceeds half and half, — it having occurred to these practitioners, who had a steady eye to the main chance, that Archie would perhaps have a run of business through his wife's acquaintance. The offer, after a conference between Archie and Frances, had been accepted; and he was now spending most of his days in calling upon all his acquaintances in the city, recent as well as old, and informing them of his readiness to do their law business. It was an irksome and a distasteful task. But he put the best face on it he could, and, with his easy manner, got through his calls somehow, without any great feeling of having made a fool of himself.

But the calls did not seem to be productive of business. The time came when he had no more calls to make and the season of waiting began. Those were tedious days. No one turned up with a case. It was rather strange, he thought. All the men he had called upon had received him well. Was it possible that they never had any lawsuits? They were mostly merchants; surely a merchant ought to get into lawsuits or have papers to be drawn. Perhaps they had other lawyers. But then most of them had certainly promised him their business. Still, none came. Meanwhile the stock of cash was getting low. Frances was making nearly enough to pay their board; at least she had told him she would manage that item of expense. But there were other expenses; and his own little fund of money kept ebbing, ebbing. Still, he was not downcast. He

did not borrow trouble. There were old college cronies of his, — young lawyers, who had offices down-town, and who were waiting, like him, for business that did not come. It was a pleasant thing to pay a call on some one of these fellows any day and go out to lunch together; and when he found that he lost nothing by being out of his office, he fell into an easy way of passing half the day with these friends. As for Messrs. Drumm & Grabham, they did not seem to want to give him any work of their own, — which was not to be wondered at, as they had given him desk-room only in the hope of his bringing a little more grist to their mill. He always came home to Frances with the same cheery smile and light heart that he used to meet her with at Marshton; and never did he greet her with a cheerier smile and a lighter heart than one evening when, coming in late to dinner, he told her he had been up to the Jerome Park races, and in addition to his expenses, had lost twenty-five dollars on the pool. He was in a gay humor over his own folly, and Frances could not even then resist the contagion of his laugh, though she had already pawned most of her jewelry to keep even with their expenses. But Archie knew nothing of that. He never bothered himself to find out where the money came from to pay the bills; and Frances could not tell him, for the pain that had begun to gnaw at her heart. This was the way, then, that her fair hopes were going!

One day, one Sunday morning, as they were walking up Fifth Avenue to church, — it was a bright morning and rather early, and there were but few people on the sidewalk, — they descried, at some distance, Uncle Luther approaching. A slight shudder ran through the young wife's frame as she saw him, for the meeting called upon her for a disagreeable effort. "There is Uncle Luther," she said to Archie, as she was hanging on his arm; "I shan't bow, of course." Nor did she. Nor did Uncle Luther; the old gentleman carried himself past very straight, and saw nobody. It was a mutual cut. She held Archie's arm tighter after they had passed, as if this stony meeting had brought her closer than ever to him. Why should she not? Had she not still the same expectations that she had started with? Alas! her hopes were fast turning into forced hopes. She clung to them and kept them because she did not dare to face what was the opposite of having them.

CHAPTER XI.

— AT LEAST NOT IN THIS WORLD.

"It seems to me you are working pretty hard," Archie said to Frances one evening.

"I am not working now, dear."

"No; but you do in the daytime."

"Well, I don't object to it; I like it. I told you I liked work. If this was for a fair, why, I should like it a little; if it was only for the sake of having something to do, I should not like it at all, — I should rather spend my time reading, for one thing; but as long as it is to set us up in life by our own exertions, really, Archie, I am very happy at it."

He got up, and threw his arms around her neck and gave her a hug. "You are a good woman, Frances."

"Not any better than I should be, my dear."

Archie presently stuffed his hands in his trousers' pockets and walked up and down the room, whistling softly.

"I tell you what it is," he said, stopping before her; "I don't think this thing down town is going to work."

"What thing?" she asked.

"This Drumm & Grabham arrangement. I don't get any business, and the exchequer is decidedly low. I think, Frances," nodding his head at her as if he were adopting a resolve, "I must get some work to do."

He walked away again, his head bent in study.

"It is confoundedly hard," he said, "to know what to do. I suppose I must take something in the line of my profession and look for a clerkship in a law office. But it won't pay much."

"Never mind what it pays, dear; we can make our expenses conform to it, and be just as happy."

"That is so, certainly; just as happy. I don't mind very much what comes along. But how can we economize?"

"On rent," returned Frances, — "that is, I mean board. I think we can find a cheaper place than this that will do for us; I will look around to-morrow or next day."

"All right, my dear, and I will look for my clerkship. How we do seem to be living in a tent!" he continued, pulling a cigar out of his pocket and lighting it; "we just pull up stakes and are off as quick as a band of gypsies. We are a kind of gypsies, Frances," he continued, — "you and I; in the world enough, and yet not very much a part of it."

She was silent. He had touched upon a truth, — upon the real chord of sympathy between them, — indifference to the world. But he had also made to

vibrate the corresponding chord of difference between them, — a difference which she had only lately stumbled upon, like an object in the dark which she could not quite make out, and which he had recognized not at all. He was apart from the world because his light-heartedness took him above it; she was apart from it because the soul-life was the dominant concern to her. However, it was a vague difference, which she felt rather than saw; and it was obscured by that absence of guile in him, that unworldliness that he had just referred to, which made her love him as a kind of messenger to her own inward life, without regard to any depth of his character. He was, indeed, living out his unmalicious, bright, sunny life as gayly as a bird seems to live. There was something pathetic in this unfailing cheeriness in the midst of difficulties, — as there is in the sight of a little child in the midst of the rough shocks of a harsh world.

She left her seat and went over to the lounge he had dropped upon, and drew his head down on her shoulder. "You are a very dear boy," she said, stroking the short, wavy dark locks from his forehead. As she sat there, holding his head close to her, her fingers playing with the curls of hair, and neither of them speaking, his personality seemed to come home to her in a keen way, and produced that intensity of conception which enables us to enter thoroughly into another's life, to acquire another's sensibilities, and to stand exactly in another's point of view. She thought of

Archie struggling on in this discouraging kind of a way, and wondered if his delicate feelings were not rasped by the experience in the law, and whether he might not be concealing some sort of inner suffering from her. She thought how long it might be before their matters improved much; and — in this moment of weakness — she questioned whether she should not take a stand now and use at least a part of her current income. But when she came to dwell upon the idea, it did not seem agreeable to her, after all; it seemed more fitting for them to struggle on as they were; yet she ventured upon putting him the question, "What would you think of my asking for some of my money from Uncle Luther?"

"Do *you* want to?" he asked quickly, starting up.

"No, I do not."

"Don't do it, then," he said, relapsing into his easy posture.

"You don't mind being a lawyer's clerk, then?" she asked, after a while.

"No; of course not. It is a common enough thing. But the wages are apt to be small, — that is what I object to, — unless, indeed, you just happen to drop into a very desirable place. But that is n't to be hoped for. However, don't be anxious, Frances. It will come out all right." He pulled her face down to his and kissed it.

In a week or so — it was now getting toward Christmas — Archie, after much vain search, and doing the

best he could, — for law clerks were a drug, — secured a place in an office where, to tell the truth, he was more desired for his penmanship than his legal learning; at a salary of — six dollars a week.

"That *is* cheap; is n't it, Frances?"

She could not help laughing at his look of dismay. "Well, it is better than nothing," she said. "But, Archie, that means, really, cheaper board; and I think I have found a place."

"Where?" he asked eagerly.

"That way," she answered, pointing toward the North River; "over there, where there are little bits of houses; and not so bad, either," she added, tossing her head; "and the price — what do you think?"

"I don't know."

"And a very nice landlady thrown in. Only twelve dollars a week!"

"For us both?"

"For both."

"And clean?"

"Yes, clean, but small; and as for the board, — we can only guess what it will be."

The removal was soon effected. But the business of baby dress-making having become a trifle slack, Frances, with this drawback, could not even now see her way clear to paying their reduced expenses. However, she calculated that they could get along for a while.

Week after week passed. Archie's chirography

was highly acceptable at the new law-office, but it did not bring an increase of salary; and he wrote so well, that he was kept at work copying most of the time. Nevertheless, his spirits did not flag; and he came home at night in as cheery a mood as ever, and, it must be said, left home in the morning puffing as good a cigar as ever. The gravity of finances, while it may have hovered, so to speak, above his mind, now far and now near, never really perched and made its home upon him. He would bring in a new book occasionally, and be as pleased over its possession, and as interested in reading it to his wife, as if he could spare a fortune to stock a library with. There was something almost incongruous in seeing these bright new books in such modest apartments. It seemed to be a fact, that no degree of poverty could take away his literary appetite, and that no notion of cutting out a way for himself in the world could warp his native tastes, or prevent their occasional indulgence. But Frances never uttered a word about extravagance, though she sometimes spent a tearful quarter-hour looking down in a forlorn way into the little back yard of their house, while he was off at his business. She did, however, write to Miranda, and had her send down several trunks of clothes, all she had which she had brought from Paris, and then pawned their contents without delay. The board bills were paid, but Archie knew not the means.

To tell the truth, Frances was in a mind to be a little forehanded in money matters just now, aside from

the care for the board bills. Not all the little baby-clothes that she had been making were being made for other people.

But, alas! the little one came, — came, but it never breathed.

Poor Frances! poor Archie! This little girl might have been such a bright spot for them in this rather wearing, poverty-stricken sort of life. A little crow, a gurgle, from a sputtering, wondering bit of humanity would have been such a greeting for the light-hearted father, home from his six-dollars-a-week copying; and there was the motherly instinct in the young wife, that made her weep bitterly over this disappointment. For the first time since she had known Archie, she felt like leaning on him; in this simple sorrow she sought his condolence. He, poor fellow, was grieved enough; but he concealed his own feeling in part, to cheer her up. For a while she lost interest in the enterprise of making their own living. Babies' dresses were hard for her to make now. It was nothing but dresses. If there were only a dear little soft form to put into one of them!

Archie wrote to Aunt Miranda about it; and that dear old lady nearly cried her eyes out over the letter. She told Luther of it. He looked at her steadily after he heard it, — a look whose steadiness she hoped would turn into a softening; and she watched eagerly for it. But it did not come. His lips became only the more compressed as he revolved the ill-tidings in

his mind. Then he turned away and left her, without saying a word. But she herself came down to the city that very day, alone, and took care of Frances till she was well. The kind old aunt braced herself up wonderfully, and became fairly hearty and firm under this test of her strength. But kind as she was, and as much of a comfort as she was to her charge, her niece still seemed to find only in Archie's sympathy the balm that really soothed her heart.

But even this sorrow became in time an accustomed thing, and there came into their lives an adjustment to the bit of mournful history. The little clothes that had been made were put away, finally, without being taken out every day or so, at some quiet moment, to catch the inevitable mother's tear-drop that seemed to baptize them into a sort of sacredness. The old care, the question of ways and means, returned again to engage her mind; and with this care, returned again her old independence. The temporary need she had felt of help from her husband gradually passed away, and she became, as she had been before, his support in their little battle for a living. Yet Archie scarcely knew that he relied upon her. She was stanch, — he was aware of that; but he did not detect that she was the one who stood between them and a still worse plight. Everything that was, came to him as a matter of course.

More than once she came very near to recognizing the truth. In spite of her responsiveness where her

husband's unworldliness appealed to her, she felt a lack of mutuality, a sense of giving where there was nothing given in return. She was sensible of a certain consecration to him on her part; and in return for that there was a vague feeling of getting only an idiosyncrasy from him, and that was a native propensity to mate with the brightest of everything that came in his way, to walk in the sunlight, — so as to have wedded her, perhaps, not with a deep, searching devotion, but only from a sheer drift toward the pleasant. But all this pondering and occasional misgiving only drew her, after all, more fervently to him. She could not help liking him; and if his nature was possibly lighter than hers, if his life was that of a kind of innocent child in a harsh world, she loved him for that very simplicity of character, and was passionately moved to befriending him and supplying him, in herself, what he lacked. She was not selfish enough to insist on getting as much as she gave; while the pang of that want smote her heart, her affection wound around him in a devoted way, as a mother's protecting arm may clasp her child.

To the world she was defiant. One day, Mary Frost, deviating from the practical, ventured, in the kindness of her heart, upon the sympathetic. "I am afraid you and Mr. Hiller are having a hard time," she said unwittingly.

"Not in the least," responded Frances, with a slight toss of her head even to this good friend; "we are not having a hard time at all. It is what we started

out to do, to work our own way; and we shall. And we like it; at least I know Archie is happy, — though of course he would like to go on faster; but he is not dejected, and I am not. These hard times are all on the outside;" and then she added, more gently, "Our hearts are just as bright as ever, Mary dear." Nevertheless, Mary thought they might be brighter, and quietly went her own way. But she kissed Frances on the spot, and said they were a brave couple.

But, in truth, money matters were beginning really to pinch. Their extraordinary expenses had encroached materially on the proceeds of Frances' wardrobe that had gone to the Jew; and their earnings were not enough to carry them clear. The difficulty was beginning to weigh on Frances' mind. There were some valuables yet left, it was true, that might be pawned; but she *did* want to keep them in reserve. Archie's wages, just about this time, were put up to eight dollars a week, as he announced to her with a beaming face, one evening; but even this munificence of Messrs. Pincher & Skinner was not enough to make the ends meet. Certain bits of lawn appertaining to Frances' apparel were getting too thin to hold the embroidery that edged them; and rents came in washing that could not be mended. One night this shabbiness caught Archie's eye. "Bless me! Frances, what are we coming to? Just look at this!"

She looked down at her shoulder, with a smile. "Oh, I don't care. What difference does it make?"

"It makes this difference," he replied; "if we were rich, I should say you were a miser, to wear such a thing; as we are not, however, I should say it was too bad."

He took hold of the culprit garment, and tried to make the rent edges come together. But he only made the tear larger. Frances laughed at him. "You see you are a man, and don't know enough to let it alone."

But Archie was serious. "My poor girl!" he said, resting his arms on her bare shoulders, and looking into her eyes. His seriousness touched her, and her eyes became moist under his look. Still, she smiled at him. At length he removed his arms and walked away. "Frances, I am afraid I have not been saving enough. Look at those things;" and he pointed to two or three new books on the table, — their parlor was their bedroom, — brought home within a fortnight; "and look at that;" and he held up with the other hand the guilty embroidery. He walked away, and stood for a time with his back to her and his head bowed. At length he said, looking very solemn, "Will you forgive me, dear?" The tears were almost in his eyes now. "Perhaps I have not considered how much you were sacrificing for me."

It was with difficulty that she kept herself from giving up, at last, her brave front. She felt a passionate desire to fall on his breast and give way to a long-pent-up flood of tears; not from weariness in her efforts to

make their way, but from the loneliness of her struggle, which these few words of his suddenly made seem pathetic. She wavered a moment; and then she said, playfully: "Archie, you should not be concerned about such small things. Are not books better than embroidery? And I am going to get something new in place of this, next week. You are a dear, good fellow to think about it; but you must not feel bad;" and she stroked his cheek. But he did feel bad; and after this, he seemed to be thinking much about her clothes, and became curious to know what she had, and just how their money matters were. She told him; and he seemed to be uneasy and to brood over it, in spite of her making light of the difficulties.

Not long after this the landlady, one Saturday when Frances rapped on her door to pay the board, made the astonishing declaration that the week's bill was paid. Frances was aghast. "Why, who, Mrs. Morton, — who has done it?"

Mrs. Morton wore a bold front, — evidently assumed, but very bold. "It has been paid, Mrs. Hiller, and that is enough; enough for me, and I 'm sure it ought to be enough for you."

"But no, it is n't," answered Frances, having to laugh at the landlady's artificial harshness; "I want to know."

"Well, you can't know."

"But, Mrs. Morton, there are some people at least whom I really should not allow to pay our board."

She was thinking of her uncle. "I should pay it over again and make you take it; I would not have it on my mind."

"Oh, you need n't trouble yourself, Mrs. Hiller," said the landlady, indifferently; "this person you would n't mind."

To all Frances' appeals for information, Mrs. Morton was deaf; and as for taking the money twice, it was "No, I shall not, I shall not;" and with that the colloquy ended.

She told Archie about it. He could not think who it was. But a few evenings afterward, seeing old Warburton pacing off briskly under a neighboring gas-lamp, and suddenly disappearing in the darkness, he declared upon his soul he believed it was Caleb who had turned in to help them. In spite of Frances' injunction to Mrs. Morton to accept no more money if it should be offered, she found her next week's bill settled as before. "Mrs. Morton," she said, "I shall have to leave your house."

"Very well, Mrs. Hiller; but I don't believe you can escape your benefactor."

Short-sighted as we are, it came to pass that they did leave this house, and that soon. One day early in May, when there had been a sudden change in the weather from warm to cold, Archie came home, not feeling well. The next day he had a bad cold and came up early from the office; the day following he was ill in bed, and the doctor was called in. He pronounced it

a case of pneumonia. Frances was staggered at first. She told Archie as gently as she could what the doctor said. He only smiled, however, and said he should soon be up and out again. The doctor called again in the evening, and said he was much worse. That afternoon Mary Frost had come in; and when she found the case they were in, she insisted on staying there to help Frances, and sent word home about it. She also confided to her friend that she had a piece of news which might help the invalid to get well.

"What is it?" asked Frances.

"It is just this," she answered; "Mr. Montgomery said to me, only yesterday, that he was worn out with hard work and wanted some rest. I said, 'Why, there are plenty of law clerks, Mr. Montgomery; why don't you get a clerk?' and he replied that he knew there were hosts of them, but he did not want clerks, he wanted a partner, — a young partner; and you should have heard the despairing tone in which he said how difficult it was to find a proper man. 'Mr. Montgomery,' I said, 'I will engage to find you a partner in every way suitable.' 'If you do,' he said, laughing, 'I will take him.' He did not think I could do it. I said at once, 'Do you remember Mr. Harry Merley?' — you remember, Frances, your father and he used to be very good and old friends, — 'and Fanny Merley? and Mr. Hiller, whom she married?' 'Yes; I never thought of him,' he said; 'I believe he *would* do. It is astonishing how stupid a person can be about such

things; I should never have thought of him; but, to tell the truth, I took a real fancy to Hiller;' and so it was arranged that I should ask your husband to call on him."

"Tell it to him just like that, Molly," said Frances.

Molly did, bending over his bed, and Archie's eyes lighted up; and Frances kissed him softly then, over and over again, doing her best to be calm.

"You must get well for this," she whispered.

"No fear of that," said Archie, cheerily; but his voice was weak as he said it.

No nurses could have been more assiduous than these two women, and the physicians were of the best the city had; yet, in spite of it all, on the very next night — with what farewell words are possible from a man who never gives up hope — Archie Hiller died.

It was in the afternoon of the following day. Frances sat alone in the little chamber whose walls had been witness to the brave fight with the world that had gone on there, — a fight in which the world had not been victor, but which death, with relentless intervention, had put an end to. Here she was alone, with the pall and its burden standing in the middle of the apartment. The room, with its humble garniture, was in perfect order; the ingrain carpet looked bright; the coarse lace curtains, surmounted by their old, figured gilt cornices, were looped up with regularity of fold; the books and papers were arranged with exactness on

the small centre-table, now pushed against the wall, — all as if the room were just out from under the morning touches of the tidy young housewife in the every-day life of the past few weeks. The orderliness was almost painful. It bespoke a mind that, stunned by great and extraordinary things, had mechanically occupied itself with the little and the accustomed.

The little space of the apartment that was not taken up with the bed and stove and other furniture was scarcely more than large enough to receive its unusual holding, — the silent form that lay stretched on its bier.

She sat alone. It was all silence, dead silence, — except for the occasional rattle of a wagon on the pavement outside. Not even a sob broke the stillness of the interior. She sat there, in the same paralysis of her emotional faculties that had held her since her husband's last breath. Not a tear had dimmed her eye. She had gone about her usual household offices, and these special ones that death had brought, with the carefullest womanly attention. Her power of emotion seemed to be suspended.

She was sitting now, on an ottoman, looking vacantly before her, her head leaning on her hand, — in an attitude of one taking a momentary rest. Yet she had been sitting thus for an hour. She did not know it.

There came a knock at the door. In the hush it sounded loud, and startled her. She arose. The door

opened, and Uncle Luther stepped with bared head across the threshold.

She looked at him a moment. Then, as quick as thought, she dashed in between him and the lifeless form, and stood there facing him, with her eyes flashing fire, her fingers clinched, and her chest heaving, — as if she would have defended the form on the pall against him; a tigress could not have been fiercer before her young.

Luther stood regarding her, — a look of utter helplessness on his strong face. So they remained, moment after moment, moment after moment; the excitement of the woman subsiding little by little, little by little. At last she could speak. Still standing defiant, she said hoarsely, "He is dead, sir."

The old gentleman's lips moved. "Frances! Frances!" he cried, in a broken tone of anguish; and he advanced with a hasty, impulsive movement, and clasped the desolate woman in his arms in a passionate embrace; and there, his head bowed down over hers, he cried, audibly and convulsively, like a child, — tears of remorse and pity over her whom he had been harsh to, over one whom the world, nay Death, had come in and struck after he had struck her, and harder than he had; as if his initial blow had invited attack upon her from every hostile force; as if he had led the way, he, the strong man! — and yet he had loved her all the time. Oh! the bitter sorrow! She clung tightly to him. They said not a word.

When finally he released her and walked away, recovering himself, her own eyes were yet quite dry; and when he had wiped his last tear away, she, still standing where she was, calmly turned down the sheet that covered Archie's face and said to her uncle, "Come and look, now." He approached reverently and gazed at the features. He even reached out his hand and pushed gently back a stray lock that had curled down on the forehead.

"I was wrong," he said at length, in a whisper, still looking at the face. Then again, looking across the body steadily into his niece's eyes, he said in a strong, unwavering voice, "I was wrong."

CHAPTER XII.

THE GROCERY STILL STANDS.

PARKS stood on the platform of Joshua Sanford's store. It was noon, — and May again. The sun had just gone behind the front gable of the grocery, and cast a very narrow shadow upon the planks below. Within this shadow, which barely afforded him a retreat from the hot rays, Parks stood, leaning against the door-frame, with a wooden toothpick in his mouth, his legs crossed, in an attitude of repose. At his elbow, one half of the double front door was open; and a cool draught of air, bearing an odor of brown sugar, issued from the dark interior of the establishment, and, flaring sideways in its emergence upon the world, breathed upon Parks, refreshing him and giving him a sense, by its saccharine fragrance, of being at home.

His return from his midday repast had relieved Joshua Sanford, who had gone off to his own dinner. Parks was in sole charge. But there were no customers to be waited upon. Noontide was the hour, at Marshton, when, except at night, the people most retreated to their homes and left the streets of the village alone. One could walk about the place at that time of day,

and passing house after house, with its green blinds drawn and the sun beating upon the glaring white clapboards, while the peonies and daffodils baked in the dry beds that skirted the walks of the dooryards, have imagined that some mighty event, perhaps the sight of a naval combat on the Sound, had drawn the whole populace temporarily out of their homes and away from the village. It could scarcely be fancied that human breaths were being drawn anywhere in this silent place.

Yet, if one should turn one's eyes from the rows of white-and-green houses, and cast a glance across the village green, it was not unlikely that this spell of apparent desolation would be broken. Not only would the visitant of this spot have seen a few cows there, chewing their cuds under the broad shade of the elms, but very likely, too, a parcel of urchins menacing the peace of the cattle by a noisy game of ball. But such a gathering as this was but a side invasion of the quiet of the Marshton noontide. These boys were but the few in the town whose fathers hired out their labor, who had dined at twelve and were abroad again, when most of the better-to-do part of the town was still within doors at its meal. Mingled with these juveniles, there were likely to be seen, beside, some older youths, who, like Parks, beginning life in the hire of others, took their dinner at the earlier hour in order to accommodate their masters, and who could snatch a few minutes in the lull of the noontide for a little idleness or play.

It was at such a mixed group of ball-players that Parks was looking as he lounged this noon by the grocery door. It was but a desultory game that was going on, and he regarded it with only a dull attention, — much as the ruminating cows did under the trees. As he stood there, he heard footsteps approaching along the sidewalk, and, by a sidelong glance, not deigning to turn his head, he observed that it was Newcomb who was coming. Newcomb made as if he would have passed on, not deeming it to comport with his dignity to stop and gabble by the wayside. But Parks was in a mood to have a word with Newcomb; and while he would not, for the world, have shown any anxiety to stop his passing acquaintance in order to discharge himself of his word, he was yet minded to send a charge of small shot after him, as it were, to see what effect it might have. So, without altering his indolent attitude, or even removing his wooden toothpick, he remarked, in an off-hand way, "Warm day, Newcomb."

Newcomb looked up at his fellow-boarder, — the first glance he had condescended to give in his direction, and assented, "Yes, pretty warm." His gait slackened a trifle, — as much as it was proper for Newcomb to slacken his gait on being accosted, — as if he would have said: "Well, Parks, you never have anything to say worth hearing. If you want to talk to me, out with it; I can give you a minute perhaps." Parks observed the slight concession, and moving

leisurely forward to the edge of the platform, stood with his feet apart and his hands stuffed in his trousers' pockets, with an assumed air of slight swagger, as if he was not to be bullied by the station-agent. Newcomb had halted, but his face was still turned up the street whither he was going; he could only give one ear to anything Parks might have to say.

"A new arrival, I hear," ventured the grocery clerk. The auditor was silent. "I hear they came this morning," he continued.

As a matter of fact he had heard nothing of the sort; but he wished to particularize in order to draw Newcomb out. What he had heard — and that was since dinner, or he would have had this talk across the table that noon at Mrs. Wormsley's — was that the Marsys had arrived in town and were to inhabit the "old Marsy house;" and that was all. But having heard as much as this, he was consumed with a desire to hear what else there was about it. Otherwise he would never have exposed himself in this way to the chance of being snubbed by Newcomb; and Newcomb, he conceived, must be the best-posted man on the subject in the village, by virtue of his constant attendance at the railway station.

Newcomb did not assent nor dissent when his interlocutor said he had heard "they came this morning." He did not even look at Parks, and Parks went on, —

"I hear there are three in the family, — the old lady and her two sons."

Newcomb now surveyed the youth, as if to make sure whether he was making game of him or not; but Parks was as sober as a judge.

"They say they 're goin' to open up the old house and make it their home," continued he. "A pleasant way, that, of coming back to your old place and living in it when you 're old, — the old lady, I mean; I s'pose the boys may find it a little dull. I ain't heard whether they 're lost any money or not. But I hear some think they 're doin' it to economize. I don't know," he added, in a riot of the imagination, "but they may be goin' to take summer-boarders; I suppose —"

"Who told you so?" smartly demanded the hearer, fixing a keen eye on Parks.

"I did n't say anybody told me about the summer-boarders. I said I did n't know but — "

"Well, you *don't* know; and what 's the use o' sayin' what you don't know?"

"I s'pose anybody can say an innocent thing like that."

"If it ain't more wuth hearin' than that, it ain't wuth sayin', *I* think."

Newcomb waited for Parks to hit out again. But Parks declined. Then his friend assumed toward him a look of deep disgust. "You don't know no more about this thing than that there fly. There ain't no old lady, and there ain't no two sons. The old lady, as you call her, has been dead these fifteen year; and there 's only one man by the name of Marsy that 's

comin' here. The other 's his friend. And they did n't come this mornin', neither. They 've b'en here two days a'ready. There is an old woman, and she is the housekeeper; and I should judge by the horses that 's come that they ain't much need to economize. That 's about what 's happened; and you got it about as straight as most people get things in this town;" and, still wearing his look of disgust, Newcomb turned and went on his way, leaving Parks the happy possessor of the information he had sought without appearing to seek for it. He chewed his toothpick and went into the store, to sit down on one of the sugar barrels and ponder it all, and let his imagination drift.

"Friend, is it?" thought Parks; "and who is the friend? I don't believe old Newcomb knew. He would have told me if he did. I bet there ain't many in this town can get as much out of Newcomb as I can. They don't know how to go about it;" and Parks kicked his dangling heels against the sugar barrel, in an absent, meditative way. "And then there 's the horses. Newcomb did n't say how many. I wonder if he keeps racers. There ain't no track around here. I wonder if he 'll lay one out on the farm. He might get a half-mile track in if he cut down some o' the woods. Gracious! old Ebenezer Green 'll wake up now; we 'll have more horse-talk now, than you can shake a stick at."

At this moment a vehicle rolled up and stopped in front of the grocery. Parks jumped down from his

seat and went to the door. Two strangers were sitting in a phaeton, to which was harnessed a well-groomed, banged-tail little mare, with her eyes and ears all alive, but standing as still as a post. Even Parks, who was not addicted to horse-flesh, could not help admiring so much animal life so well disciplined, nor the bright varnish of the phaeton. The usual style of horses and vehicles that drove up before the store was something different. While his attention was engaged with these objects, the man who was driving gave the reins to his friend and jumped out. He looked up at the grocery and at the large sign across its front. "'Joshua Sanford,'" he read, "'Groceries, Provisions, &c;' that's the place." Parks noted his appearance. It had occurred to him that this might be the veritable Mr. Marsy and his friend.

'The Marsy man,' if it were he, was a person slightly above the average height and well built. He had a sandy mustache and a healthy color in his face. His dress was rather careless; but his clothes fitted him well, and — an unusual thing for Marshton — he wore tan-colored driving-gloves. "Ah! how d'ye do?" he said to Parks, in an off-hand, easy way, as he came up. "I want to buy a few odds and ends. I sent up a lot of stuff from the city, but I didn't remember everything. By the way," he continued, "what are your prices for some things, — sugar and flour, for instance? It would be more convenient to trade with you, if you are not too much above the city market."

Parks promptly gave him Joshua Sanford's scale of prices, and assured him that their object was to keep Marshton trade in Marshton, by "selling close" and not over-charging.

The stranger pulled out a note-book, and consulted it. "Ah, no; you're not so far out of the way. That's very fair. That isn't so bad;" and he closed the note-book and put it back. "Now then, let's see; I have a list here somewhere." He fumbled in his pockets, and at length produced the paper he was searching for and handed it to Parks.

They entered the store; and while Parks was hurrying about, filling the order with his usual despatch, the customer, after walking around and surveying the contents of the grocery for a few minutes, went outside. Leaning on the phaeton, he followed his friend's gaze to the ball-playing that was going on. The friend was a man of about his own age, with black hair and a thinnish beard. His face was a trifle pale; and he sat in the carriage in such a stiff way, that one would have imagined he might be crippled, even if two stout canes had not been in plain sight at his feet.

The game of ball, as it had been played, had stopped. But the older players were throwing the ball about from one to another. Only one of the youngsters remained among them, and he was about the smallest of his own small tribe and, to judge from his clothes, decidedly a child of poverty. He stood on one of the bases and made a couple of first-rate catches,

though his little fingers could scarcely more than clutch the ball; but they held it tight.

"Hi! look at the little chap!" said Marsy, in a tone of surprise.

"He does well," responded Graham.

"He does indeed."

But the urchin got no more chances to prove his skill and grit. The older fellows no longer noticed him, but threw the ball to one another, over his head. He put up his hands in a wistful way, now and again, when some one would start to throw; but he never was honored with a throw to himself. It looked strange to see such a little, pinched figure among the big ones, begging a chance to get the swift balls into his tiny hands, — a brave little chap. For all they neglected him, he never seemed to cease expecting that he was going to be treated to a catch, until it became almost pitiful to watch his eagerness and perpetual disappointment. By and by Marsy said: "By Jupiter, Aleck, it is too bad that they don't give the little chap a chance. I've a great notion to go in and get him a ball for himself."

"Go on; I'll go you halves," said Graham; "no cheap thing, John."

"'Regulation,'" he answered, as he walked off.

Marsy procured the ball in the grocery, and sauntering across the green, drew the youngster's attention. "Here," he called out; "this is for you;" and he threw the fresh white ball over to him. The diminutive fig-

ure made a jump for it and caught it, and was about to throw it back again, thinking that the stranger wanted to have a little game with him. But Marsy said, "No; keep it." The mite of a barefoot looked somewhat puzzled at first, but presently began tossing his present up in the air and catching it. Marsy returned to the phaeton, and found Parks there, stowing away the packages. When they were all in and he was about to get in himself, he happened to look round, and, in doing so, caught sight of the protégé without any ball and the big fellows throwing it around, clearly distinguishable by its white color, among themselves.

"Well, that won't do," he said in a decided tone, looking over at Graham.

"A short-lived blessing, at this rate," muttered Graham.

Marsy walked over to the green, and going up to a full-grown young man, who happened to be nearest, said, "That ball belongs to the small boy yonder; I just gave it to him."

"Oh, he will let us use it," answered the other, not taking the trouble to look round.

"That is all on one side," returned Marsy; "you did n't let him use yours."

"Oh, he don't care," answered the other, still throwing the ball and not looking at Marsy.

"I do!" the latter answered, in a tone that might have served as a warning if one had attended to tones.

No answer was vouchsafed to this, but the b came and went again. The next time it came Mar stuck out his hand and caught it. In doing so l came into collision with the player, so that the latt was thrown down. He got up, a good deal surprise and surveyed the interloper from head to foot.

"What in the devil do you mean?" he asked, ste ping up to him in a menacing way.

It had been in our friend's mind, notwithstandi his blood was slightly up, to apologize for giving tl fall; but under the circumstances he gave it up.

"I mean," he said, as he stood facing his opponer "that that ball is going where I want it to; and if y want to object, now is your time to do it."

The villager seemed at length, as he surveye Marsy, to comprehend that something particular ar decided was going on in the stranger's mind, and c the whole he was not up to facing it. The swagger di appeared from his manner, and he remarked, in a sur tone, that he did n't "care about the old ball." Mar threw it over to the petrified infant, who, on getting into his hands again, scampered off with it. The i terrupted game went on with the old ball, and the tw friends jogged along home, while Parks chuckled in tl doorway over what he had seen.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HOUSE OF GOOD-WILL, AND HOW TO GET THERE.

THE road that led from Marshton to the old Marsy place, or rather to the old Marsy farm, — for the tract was not of such size, nor of such elegance in its ornamentation, either, as to answer exactly to the idea of a "place," — was the same one that led by Ebenezer Green's old mill, and which we have travelled before in this history, in company with Frances and Archie Hiller.

It was a highway of only local use. Leaving the turnpike just west of the town and sweeping away toward the Sound, it presently became fringed, in a disorderly style, with wild-rose bushes that throve rarely on its damp, undrained edges, and with maples that grew there untrimmed. Together they formed a tangle, wherein the birds, quite secure, seemed to sing a more abandoned song than they sang elsewhere. At its farthest stretch from the village it looked out upon the Sound, where the schooners were seen, toy-like and stationary, far away in the channel. At this point stood the parsonage; and a few paces beyond was the white, shell-paved lane that led down to the oyster-

men's houses; and beyond, a little way, was the gate of the convent, — the "House of Good-Will," — to which the parsonage was appurtenant. Here the Sound was no longer visible, and the road, resuming its inland aspect between the cultivated fields, and having made a semicircle around the village, re-entered the turnpike.

There was not much travelling on this highway, except that done by the venerable occupant of the parsonage, Mr. Farrington, and his equally venerable lady, whose old pony used to take them along at a jogging pace in a loose-wheeled old phaeton; and the sisters of the convent possessed a somewhat smarter nag, that used to transport them here and there about the country on their business, in a box-wagon with a square, black canvas top. Beside these, and the occasional teams to the mill, there were not many conveyances, — nor much else but quiet. Once in a while an oysterman trudged along to or from the village; and in ploughing time the peace might be broken by the voice of a farmer speaking to his draught-cattle, the sound of whose hoofs and of the ploughshare in the soft soil had not been audible through the wild-growing hedge.

Nearly opposite the convent there rose up, over the tops of the maples, — not so much by virtue of its own height as by the aid of the swelling ground beneath it, — a collection of gables, whose several small windows, set well up under the peaks, seemed to be sentinel eyes, keeping unremitting watch far and wide over

the country. An old-fashioned picket-fence, of undoubted respectability in its day, usurped the customary stone-wall for a long way in front of this pile of gables, indicating, by its length, that the customary "door-yard" was here broadened into a grander stretch of grass. The fence, however old, was in good repair; and being freshly painted, it had the appearance of enjoying a capable old age. Behind it ranged, like a rear rank, a cedar hedge, whose stately height and thick limbs showed that it, too, was no upstart sojourner in this region. Turning in at the gate, where, when in bloom, some old lilac-bushes greeted the incomer with their fragrance, and winding on by the clumps of low-branching evergreens and in the shade of the pervasive maples, one came to an open space at length, whence the lower part of the structure, whose peaks had been visible from the road, could be seen. There was the shingled front of an old farm-house; but instead of the weather-beaten gray or the glaring white and the green blinds, it was painted a dark color, and the front door, instead of opening directly upon the grass, was covered by a broad piazza, which stretched across the whole front and passed round the side of the house. At the side there was found to be much more of an edifice than could be seen from the front. The new part was all shingled like the old, and bordered by the same broad piazza. The ground space of this structure was so broad that it made the whole building look low, as if it were too modest to climb high, or as if mother

earth, having conceived an attachment for the spurious offspring that had been laid on her breast, were endeavoring to draw it to herself with her groping fingers, — the numerous thick vines that crept up about the piazza posts. In the spring and early summer the well-cropped lawn was dotted with robins, which swept back and forth between the grass and the top branches of a couple of old elms, — trees that sent a checkered shade over the sward; it might have been all a great cage in which the birds whistled, and hunted their worms, and flew about, and were content. This was the curtilage of the Marsy farm.

The older part of the house was ancient enough to have become, by our time, decrepit, if not wholly extinct, — sagging out of plumb and sinking finally to the ground, — had not Henry Marsy, father of John Marsy, stiffened it up with new beams, and so started it on a fresh lease of life. It looked now tolerably well-to-do, but venerable too; for all the additions had been made in the old style.

There was a story of some little singularity as to how this house came to be built at all. Sixty years ago, the Marsys were living across the road, in the broad, stone mansion, which still stood there, in deep retreat from the road, approached through a long straight lane of ancient, spindling cedars; a miniature house it looked, in perspective, down this alley. It had been built nearly a century before that time, by the Marsys, who were then a fugitive Huguenot family, settling farther

eastward on the coast than most of their kind. They had owned, in the early times, much of the land about here, — all of the oystermen's little fee-simples having been carved out of the tract, besides many of the farms lying east of Marshton. At one point in the history of the family, there had been two brothers, Edward and Philip junior; and Philip junior being, so the world thought, a harum-scarum fellow, with little good in him, — but that was not the fact, though he may have been harum-scarum, — and having fallen in love with one Marie Delacroix, living farther westward down the coast, and she with him, and the match being opposed by her parents, and he being aboard a vessel of our navy in the War of 1812, and she finally in her hot-headedness running off to be married to him, and arriving at the appointed place only to meet a messenger, come ashore in a row-boat, to tell her of his death in the last fight, and being discarded then by her family for her wilfulness, — all this having happened, the mourning father, Philip, who had been Philip senior, and who was now simply Philip, took her to his heart as his own daughter; and she, having buried her life with her lover, and devoted herself much to good works, was given by the old man, on his death-bed, the stone mansion and ground with it, for such religious and charitable use as she chose to make, — all with the ready assent of Edward. Edward, then, taking the other portion of the land, and funds beside, built the wooden house (the ancient part of it) which we have just described. In time, this frame

building came to be known as the "Marsy Place;" while the old stone building, under Marie Delacroix's use of it, gained among the people the title of "the convent," though the name she had given it was the "House of Good-Will."

Edward Marsy, above mentioned, — to bring our history down to date, — was the father of Henry, who was the father of John (with whom is our present concern). But this grandfather Edward, being comfortably off in this world's goods, was fain to equip still better the charitable establishment of Marie Delacroix; and imposed upon his farm a rent-charge, which should go to the support of a clergyman who should be chaplain at the convent, and have the care of the souls of the oystermen and such others as might come in his way. He, with Sister Marie, had called to this living Mr. Jonas Farrington, and had installed him in one of his own cottages down by the water, — the dwelling that has been spoken of as the parsonage. The incumbent had, through many years, grown gray and bent in his service; and no one, Edward nor Henry nor John, had asked a penny for this use of the cottage.

In time, Sister Marie had died, and was succeeded by one Sister Marca, who in turn had passed away; and now Sister Ambrosia was the superior of this House of Good-Will, — an institution which at all times followed the form of the Protestant Episcopal Church.

This neighborhood, aside from the changes that death brought, was a staid and unaltering spot, — with

the convent established in perpetuity; the sons of the oystermen growing up and succeeding their fathers in their calling; the Marsys, from father to son, holding the old farm; and the clergyman, Mr. Farrington, fitting well into the quiet corner he had come to, doing his best to promote good-will among the neighbors, ministering to all who had need, and helping the sisters in their work. Here, in the year 1873, John Marsy returned, with his friend Alexander Graham, to spend the rest of their joint lives.

Their joint lives. It was one midsummer evening that Marsy made his resolve to take this step. He was sitting at his Club window, looking out on Fifth Avenue, — a warm evening, when the passing feet move idly by, save those of the washerwoman and her little boy; when the down-town man, who only goes out to his family in the country for Saturday and Sunday, saunters along with his cigar and his cane of the newest fashion; when trios of shop-boys pass at a lazy gait, with their cigarette smoke and their stories; and the solitary girl wanders by in gauzy dress in search of her companion; when the breeze at the window brings only subdued sounds, and the soft starlight above struggles with the gaslight beneath. But his eye was not fixed on the scene without. It was ranging over the interior of his law office down town; over the book-shelves, regular in their rows of sheepskin binding; over the brief-case, with its dusty papers; over his table, with its files of recent letters, answered and unanswered. To enter

this office every morning and go through the routine of detail, day in and day out, through the year, — year in and year out, — what did it all amount to? This case won, that case lost, — perhaps the least meritorious won, and the most deserving lost, — there was an ill fate in this musty litigation; the incompetency of the judge; the unfair attorney; the poverty of the client, or perhaps his too great riches. How ill it all worked! Was there not some shorter, some less technical road to justice?

Then his gaze drifted up town upon the social world, — the bickerings and struggles, the shows and shams. Where was the genuine? Monsieur's and Madame's horses and carriages stood for their character; their dinner-parties and receptions covered up their emptiness, their mere money-getting; they pursued, not substance, but forms. If one does so and so, one is in New York social life. Who cares there for what any one knows, or what any one feels? Or who cares whether there is any feeling at all, — whether any one's soul ever wrestles with the Great Spirit for a meaning to the world, the universe? "What nonsense!" Monsieur and Madame will reply. "Our wine is the best. Our guests know it; they like to come to our dinners. We can command as pretty a group of diners at our table as you would wish to see."

Then he reflected upon his acquaintances at this very Club. They went to work every day, to make money. Some of them speculated in stocks; or pos-

sibly they actually turned over goods in their dealings. Some of them went through lawsuits for their clients, accepted the results, sent in their bills, and were paid. Oh! most of them had very good "positions." They went with the current and swam easily. Doubtless Marsy was very odd to criticise them.

But it was hard for him to live as they did. To think of his living and dying in that fashion gave him a mental nausea. He had done it for ten years or more, and wherein was the profit? He thought it was in nothing but in the experience that enabled him to see the shallowness of this life. He took a letter from his pocket and read and re-read it. It was from his friend Graham, telling him of the death of his sister; he did not call her his sister, but "Nellie,"—an intense personality to him; the last survivor but himself of the family, and his nurse ever since he came back from the army crippled and wellnigh helpless.

Aleck Graham!—how old the name sounded, with its school-boy and college and army associations coming freshly to his mind!

Marsy was hungry for real living. "I think," he muttered, "I will snap this string. I think I will defy the world's little pull on me, and go against it. In fact, it may go to the devil, with its nonentities." He pulled out another cigar and smoked it; and still another. Then he sat down and wrote, and went out and posted a letter to his friend. The step was taken. The next day, after a talk with his law partner, Chalmers,

he followed his letter in person; and Graham was taken possession of, and brought to Marshton, where the couple were presently seen of Parks, as heretofore noted.

The life at the farm proved a quiet one. The land, during the owner's absence, had been let on shares to one Joslyn, a farmer of the vicinity, who had occupied a farm-house that was on the property. But as he had not scored much of a success, he was ready, when Marsy wanted to manage the farm himself and pay him as a sort of overseer, to accept the proposal. The owner, therefore, had his head and hands about half full with his work; with leisure to drive about the country with Aleck, or to take him a sail on the Sound, and to pay an occasional visit in the neighborhood.

As for Aleck, he had at first ill-accommodated himself to the premature disablement that removed him from the sphere of active life. Not long after their arrival he had remarked to Marsy, with tenderness, yet not without chagrin, "This is the proper place for me,— this quiet out-of-the-way spot; I am just suited to it." On the whole, however, he had come to square himself with his lot; and after this disgust at his own failure and uselessness, there came, scarcely ever disturbed, an acceptance of his tedious fate, — a patience which was neither cheerful nor sad, but rugged; so that he made a visitor feel that his being crippled was a thing of course, of no significance one way or another, that it was perfectly proper, and that he was not an object

of pity, — a patience so successfully practised, that the effort by which it had been acquired was hid from view.

Nevertheless, when Marsy would come home from his farm affairs toward noon, brown with his life in the sun, the face of the invalid would occasionally betray a look of regret, as he thought of his own helplessness. But it was only for a moment. He was interested in the farming, and he would jerk himself up and get Marsy to tell him how he found everything, — how this crop and that crop was doing. What with this every-day questioning, and Marsy's driving him here and there about the farm, he knew pretty well how it went on; and he proved of considerable help, in the way of sound suggestion, to his friend.

Yet, after all, his life was one of irresponsibility, and of severance from the active concerns of the world. Only small things of the world seemed to be about him. As he sat on the piazza, with his books at his side, he could watch the screaming robins, as one chased another down to the sward and back again; he could note the daily growth of the vines at his hand, and the minute working of the ants on their hills at his feet. The domestic animals — forms of life possessing less power than an able-bodied man — seemed to accept him as one of their own. The Scotch terrier was his companion by the hour; and the cat, shy of all other persons, would come with erect tail and rub her head against his feet.

Samuels, the stable-man and gardener, conferred upon Graham the favor of an informality that he observed to no one else. Upright, thin-lipped, bald, and grave, he was stoical and taciturn, even to his master. But one day the invalid hobbled down to the stable and watched him groom the horses; and after that, Samuels would often come up to the house in the morning, and with his deep gravity inquire of Graham if he would not like to "go down, sir?" and then offer him his shoulder, which was more convenient than the cripple's canes.

Opposite the house, a wagon-track led through a corn-patch to a meadow bordering the shore; and often of a summer afternoon, Marsy drove his charge down there, to a particular spot, where a clump of linden trunks jutted out of the bank, and formed with their branches a shade over some seats that had been built in a circle inside the group. In front, the Sound stretched far away with its blue waters, to the dim line of Long Island; out in its centre the schooners were ever passing to and fro; and the summer clouds went straying about above the expanse, or could be seen piling up in the south a thunder-storm for regions to seaward. Off the shore were the lobster-cages, heaving up and down on the slight swell; beyond them the range of rocky, barren islets, almost covered at high tide; to the right, along the shore, was the huge reel that the fishermen wound their seine on, — a conspicuous object standing on a point of the land; beyond

that was the bight with its regularly spaced grove of oyster-stakes.

In this quiet resort the two friends passed many an hour. They did not talk much; there were books and the sight of the sea to occupy them. It was not as if Aleck had been a robust man, with the active world before him, as it was or might be before his companion. Then there would have been some object in discussion; but to a man who was only waiting to get worse, the active concerns of human life were something of a mockery. He lived in the past, — seeming to meditate much. Sometimes he would suddenly look up and say, in a haphazard fashion, "John, I think my legs are getting worse," or something of that sort. Marsy never softened the matter to him. He was quite as well aware of it as Graham was; and anything but hardy treatment would have been resented by the invalid. They might have been any pair of old grizzled trappers, with immediate death staring one of them in the face, for any emotion they showed.

But there were times, too, when a susceptibility came to the surface with Graham. As they drove home once or twice from the shore, toward evening, with the western glory of the sky before them, Marsy found, when he helped his old friend from the carriage, that he was rather shaky, — his arms trembling and his walking-sticks standing unsteadily as they held him; his nerves had not much strength left, and a slight moisture in the eye told the tale.

CHAPTER XIV.

FRANCES' DEPARTURE.

FRANCES was back at Marshton. The little world of wedded life, with all its pleasures and hopes and all its gradually discovered defects, was past, — the husband and child buried.

A year ago the neighborhood of Ebenezer Green's mill was a blithe spot. Now she can lean but for an instant over the rail of the bridge, and a tear drops down into the brook. The birch weaves back and forth under the dam just as it did a year ago; — it is a senseless thing; it is not concerned with what happens in the heart-world. Here is the stile; — laughter and daring gave it life a year ago; but all that is past. The wild-rose bushes are in bloom again, and the roses ready to be picked; but who shall pick them? Farther down the road, below the bridge, where they sat of a forenoon a year ago, there are the same boulders. For aught any one knows, it may be the same small bird that goes hopping about the apple-boughs overhead; but there is nothing for him to hear there. The voices came and spoke and went; and that is ended. What of it? These stillnesses, these vacancies, are every-

where in Nature; they are her heart. She whispers to us all, not what is, but what might be. Let her dry your eyes as she tells you there is but a common lot, — this kind sister of ours.

Next came peace, — the peace of quiescence; peace reflected from the summer meadows, from the sleeping rocks; speaking softly in the field sounds, the tiny brook, and the insects.

Then, at last, the calm spirit lifted up itself and looked about, and saw all things living again. The sky and its clouds are not a dream. The grass is bowing under the wind. The ants are busy carrying their burden. The cattle are lowing in the next field. The world is alive, after all. She is in it; what shall she do?

One flower, at least, had sprung out of Archie Hiller's grave. It was the friendship between old Luther and her. From the moment when, in the little chamber down in New York, she had passed, in a twinkling, from a sort of ferocity to reconciliation, and he had yielded, wholly broken, — from that moment a vein of tenderness had been opened in the old man, which had never been touched before; and from that moment she, different as he and she were and always would be, had found there, in him, her greatest human solace. Luther seemed to her to have been so nearly concerned in all that short history, and was now evidently so much attached to her, that she felt nearer to him than to any one else.

One day when they were sitting in the same room together, she said, "Uncle, I am going into the convent."

He dropped his book, took off his spectacles, and looked at her.

"What?"

"Yes; I think I am."

A year or more ago it had been Archie Hiller; that was bad enough. Now a convent. Luther groaned within himself.

"Frances! my dear child."

"My dear uncle," she rejoined, going to him, "what else can I do?"

"Anything."

"Nothing." She stood before him, nodding affirmation of her resolve.

"Bless me!" he said; "you take my breath away. *You* in a convent? Why, Fanny, in a year more now you will begin to wear colors again and be bright and gay. Oh, no; don't think of it, don't do it; you will be sorry. Be a good girl and stay with me."

"It won't be far," she said; "only just across the lots. You could see me often. And if you were sick or wanted anything, why, a Sister is just the one to take care of people in trouble or sickness."

"The House of Good-Will, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"But it's a *convent!* *You* in a convent!" he continued, bantering her in a half-hysterical way. "You!

why, Fanny, what a pity to put a girl like you into a convent! Let the ugly women go there, and those that are sorrowful by natur', but not a dancing, chipper, driving thing like you; that 's wrong." There was almost a tear in the old man's eye, in his strong feeling.

"I wish I was n't driving," said she; "that is what makes it."

"Ah, Fanny," he continued, in his fondling way; but suddenly stopped and let go her hand and looked at her. Then he said, in a firm tone of voice, looking her in the eye: "Two years ago I discouraged you. I thought my judgment was best. I will never be too firm again. But I will say this, my child: think on your temperament; think on it, and act wisely. You can get out of the convent in five years, anyway. But I should mourn to see five years of your young life wasted. Be wise and not too hasty."

"I won't be hasty," she answered; "and I will try to be wise."

"I *wish* I could counsel ye," he said, with warm feeling, seizing her hand again and holding it fast.

A few days afterward, Sister Ambrosia, the head Sister of the convent, was surprised by the serving-maid handing her Mr. Bradbury's card, with the word that he was waiting to see her in the reception-room. Luther fully believed in the maxim, "When you want a thing done well, go yourself;" and when he found himself in want of knowledge as to the Sisters' manner

of living in certain respects, instead of pricking up Miranda to get it for him, he had boldly come to the convent himself. Although he was active in church work, he had never been particularly drawn to the Sisters. He did not even know them by sight. They were all just hoods and gowns to him, — a class, not individuals. When Sister Ambrosia entered the reception-room, therefore, she comported herself with considerable dignity toward her visitor. Luther, however, was quite ready.

"I have come to see you, madam," he said, "to make some inquiry as to your way of living; not out of curiosity, — not out of idle curiosity. It is very likely that I ought to be informed already on these points, but I am not. I never paid much attention to them."

Sister Ambrosia felt a little slight in these last words, as if it were intended that the matters that Mr. Bradbury had not paid much attention to had scarcely been worth any one's paying attention to. She drew herself up a little higher and folded her hands a little more tightly, and regarded him steadily. But he was not dismayed. This was a business errand; and he could not possibly be disturbed in anything that was business. He surveyed the Sister calmly, and continued: "My particular motive in making my inquiries, I suppose, need not be mentioned, madam. The inquiries are quite harmless, you may think them trifling even; but they concern me just at present."

"What are they?" asked the Sister, not wholly at her ease. In her office, as superioress, she had met with men of various sorts on matters of business; but Luther's great self-possession rather unsettled her. She felt somewhat as if she had been browbeaten and as if she were submitting to it.

"In the first place, madam," he returned, "will you kindly inform me whether the ladies of your Sisterhood fast, by rule or by custom, to extremes, — more than church people ordinarily do, I mean; or do they habitually stint themselves at their meals?"

"There are no rules, sir, as to fasting. Each one is left to the guidance of her own conscience. Of course, it is expected that all who belong to us desire to live a sanctified life."

"There are no rules?" repeated Luther.

"No, sir."

"And nothing extraordinary in habit or custom?"

"I think not, sir."

"Humph!" he ejaculated, as if one point was settled. "Are the Sisters permitted to see friends or relatives? Can they go to see them?"

"There is no rule about that, sir," answered the head Sister, breathing more freely, as she found Mr. Bradbury's questions easy to answer. "The Sisters live as they choose, very much; at least, it has never been found necessary to exercise any compulsion or restriction. The Sisters have always had their hearts in their work, and have been devoted to the life they have

chosen. The matter has really come up so seldom, that I could hardly refer to precedents; as I say, there is no prescribed rule."

Luther drew his hand over his cheek and seemed to be thinking, as if he meant to follow up this line of inquiry, but was puzzled how to do it. After a few moments, however, he looked up, and simply asked, "Have you a piano?"

"No," returned the Sister; "there is an organ in the chapel."

"Yes, yes, but that would hardly —" Luther checked himself abruptly. He was thinking of waltzes. "Thank you, madam, very truly, for your answers to my questions, which, I trust, may not seem impertinent; my best respects, madam."

Luther bowed himself out, leaving Sister Ambrosia rather angry with herself that he should have taken the lead in the conversation, and carried it, leaving her simply to appear as a cross-examined witness. But she quickly recognized this improper frame of mind, and, going to her room and reading and meditating, she conquered her ill-humor and ceased to cherish resentment against Mr. Bradbury. But she could not help speculating on the cause of his questioning; and Sister Agnes, coming to her room, had to call twice, with her soft voice, before she heard.

The days and weeks passed on. Frances said no more to her uncle of her plan. She shrank from giving her full confidence either to him or Miranda. It

almost made her morbid, this inevitable silence and communion with herself. Nature, — the trees, the fields, the sunsets, — they were the nearest to her; but to them she could not speak. Such silence was unendurable; so, one day, she sat down and wrote a letter to Mary Frost. The letter was in this wise: —

MY DEAR MARY, — I have written to you many times since I came back here; and at first my letters were frank and full. But of late they have not been. There was something on my mind that I could not venture to write about, — something that would be a great step to me. But I cannot keep quiet any longer. I seem to myself to be going along such a lonesome road, in keeping it to myself, that I must speak, and let you see whether I am foolish or not. I scarcely know how to begin.

It was after the first sensation of keen grief left me, when I began to think again and was not wholly occupied with memories, that a feeling of the emptiness of the world possessed me. It seemed empty when Archie died, — physically and really empty then. Now it seems morally empty. Then it was a matter of the heart; now it is a matter of something besides. I see nothing worth living for, as people usually live. I am consumed with sorrow. Don't laugh at me, or think I am high-flown. I thought it must be that at first. But I cannot get rid of it. The tears will come, and come; I cannot live so. I wish I could give myself up to pleasure, but I cannot. Life seems too serious to pass in that way. I want something great to do; I must give myself up to something. What can I do? What do I do? I will tell you truly, I have found no satisfaction, not the least, but in doing the little kindnesses that

come to my hand. Whenever I give, then living seems to have some little attraction for me. But the giving is only occasional, and I cannot live so by halves. I feel the need of dedication of some sort; something that I can yield my whole self to. Of course you know what I am going to say. A convent seems the only place for me. In that life there is a complete giving. There, I think, I should be at peace.

I started out to ask your advice. But I have written so, that it would seem foolish now to ask it. This is the first time I have confessed myself; and — again don't laugh, Mary — the tears have dropped on this paper all the way along. Oh, life is so passionate! How can I go through it self-possessed and as if it were only matter-of-fact! Forgive my weakness; it must come out.

The thing I dread most is leaving Uncle Luther. I have spoken to him. But I don't see what good I could be to him by staying with him. He is strong and always busy. If I go, however, he will think I am suffering and doing a kind of penance. I don't believe I could make him understand.

I don't know where to end. There is no end to what is on my mind. I suppose I shall hear from you.

Good-by, abruptly, from

Yours, with much love, FRANCES.

When she had written the letter, she hastened to post it, fearing that if she delayed she should tear it up instead. When it had gone, she felt as if there had been wisdom in unburdening herself, and she was lighter-hearted than she had been for days.

A reply, full and appreciative, came promptly. Her

friend suspected that possibly the quiet of the country life had something to do with the feeling of uneasiness, and she invited Frances to the city for a visit. The visit was made. But the country quiet was found not to be at the bottom of the matter; in the city or country there was the same want.

There were more talks with Uncle Luther; but they all ended the same way. In order to be near him, she chose the House of Good-Will at Marshton; and to it, in the spring, she went. It hardly seemed to Luther, after all, as if she was going away. There was no good-by said; she promised that they should see each other often; and she left the house, as she always had thought she should, at peace with her soul, — with the world opening again before her.

Marshton had its word to say about this step. Some thought it was expressive of great devotion to her late husband. Others hinted, uncharitably, that her weariness of the world might have commenced while her husband was still alive. Others, still, thought she must be very religious to give up a worldly life when she had so much money.

As to Sister Ambrosia, who was perhaps considered by some to be slightly "institutional" in her ways of charity, it was thought she had played a pretty strong hand (though, for the life of them, they could not point to any particular card) in catching this rich young lady, who would be likely to add her fortune, sooner or later, to the funds of the convent.

Parks, as usual, had to have his word about the matter. Coming in to dinner at Mrs: Wormsley's on the day when the story first got abroad, he declared the news. Old Caleb, who, after the part he had played in New York, had come to a personal acquaintance with Frances, demanded, "What is that to you, sir?"

Parks looked up amazed; and then he colored. "I can talk about it if I want to, I guess. It seems to be anybody's business."

"No, sir," returned Caleb; "it is nobody's business!"

"Then I don't see what you have got to say about it."

Caleb was too full for utterance. "Sir!" he said, with consummate dignity, rising from his place and glaring at Parks; and then, without another word, he turned from the table and left the room.

There was a sort of silence of terror at the table. Miss Christina, who was supposed to have tender feelings toward Caleb, wept.

Newcomb finally spoke. "That 's what you get for mixing up in everything," he growled.

"I ain't mixing up in everything," returned Parks. But he appeared broken, and Newcomb only smiled loftily. There was no more conversation that noon.

CHAPTER XV.

MR. MARSY UNCONSCIOUSLY STALKS A DEER.

SISTER FRANCES had not been under the roof of the House of Good-Will a year, before she found herself reverting to Uncle Luther's wise remark that one's temperament should always be taken into account. The good works that were a part of the Sister's life agreed with her desire for a devoted career; but that was only a part of the life. With the devotional and secluded side of the cloistered existence, she discovered that she was not in sympathy. The God to whom she really prayed was in Nature, not in books nor churchly forms.

In the woods there were graceful forms, slender tree-trunks, and arching ferns; overhead there was the translucent green of the leaves, and beyond that, the blue sky with its floatings of fleece of white and gray; on every hand there were leafy aisles, going on and on into the darkness of the forest; under foot there was soft moss; here and there were the joyous, wilful songs of the birds; there was the tinkle of brooks; and the straying of the wind, — like the rustling presence of some little berrying-maid, wandering through

the wood; and there were the forest odors. It was an ethereal place, that breathed far and wide a song even more exquisite than that of the birds, — coming from beyond the tree-tops, from farther than whence the breeze came; — and it was a strong place too; where the trees twisted their elbows, and stretched about as they pleased, — giving out their own music, that rumbled up even from their gnarled roots.

In the House of Good-Will there were no such things. There was a floor of naked boards; there were whitewashed walls; there were doors and window-frames painted a dull lead-color. There was nothing else but quiet.

In this house, at moments, even a mouse's squeak was a welcome sound to the young Sister's ear; and a fly crossing the pane became an object of interest, — anything to bring life into this lifeless place.

Sometimes her fancy, straying away as she sat before her little wood-fire of a winter evening, would wander back to the days when the Marsys lived in this old mansion. Bright pictures then came before her. She could imagine the celebration of some wedding going on, — these halls all brightly alight, fair young forms sweeping in and out of the rooms, delicate dresses rustling along the passages and down the stairs, fiddles squeaking to dancers in the parlors, and shouts over the wedding-cake with its buried ring. To her fond fancy, it almost seemed as if an echo of the laughter were still lingering in the air.

Nor did the exterior of the building always bear to her the aspect of a cloister. There hung about it, in reality, an air of welcome and comfort, which no change of its interior use, no alteration of its character from that of a home to that of an institution, could take away. Its generous dimensions, its broad front-door and windows, and its capacious chimneys seemed to invite to ample rooms and warm, bright hearths within. Its lichens, too, and its style of architecture — now out of date — would have softened any appearance of asperity by the look of quaintness and ripe age.

Thus the old mansion excited her sentiment only on its domestic, its secular side. At times, in the play of her worldly imagination, she conceived of the edifice, and the grounds about it, as peopled with household elves from the olden time, — imps who would not leave the old place, in spite of the nuns, but hung — half lugubriously, half defiantly, nay, perhaps with a lurking hope of restoration — among the vines on the walls without, and about the cornices and dark corners of the rooms within; — forlorn relics these, of the former uncloistered human life that once held sway here. Sometimes, in the extravagance of her fancy, she imagined these little devils as peeping out at her from the bushiness of the cedars, or sometimes as caracoling over the arabesque iron gates at the entrance to the yard, grinning angry protest everywhere against the banishment of family life from the convent. So real did these fanciful goblins become to her, that she would find herself smiling, at

times, with a certain gladness at the idea that these little coadjutors were with her in her inward rebellion.

Yet she strove to force herself into agreement with her new life. She tried to kill her worldliness, as she called it. She fasted and kept vigils, until the bloom died out of her cheek and began to die out of her soul too. But then Sister Ambrosia interfered, and insisted upon more sleep and more food; and with returning vigor, returned that perverse activity of her spirit and the passionate enjoyment of many things outside of the convent.

There were two Sisters in the convent who were the novice's envy, Sister Agnes and Sister Cecilia. The former was a gentle creature, whose poetic sentiment would have found full expression in some simple, tender hymn; the latter was bristling with ecclesiastic militancy. If Frances could have become as angelic as Sister Agnes, or as energetic a soldier of the church as Sister Cecilia, she would have won her victory and been a happy creature. But she could not acquire Sister Cecilia's zeal; nor, having failed in that, could she succeed in limiting her poetic feeling, as Sister Agnes' was limited, to the domain of revealed religion. This division of herself, as if she had left a part of herself in the outer world and could not get it into the convent. seemed to be something that kept her from becoming a real Sister at all; and there was a perpetual and passionate struggle between the two parts.

One evening in March, nearly two years after she

had entered the convent, she was sitting alone in her room. The scant, uncolored furnishing and the bare whitewashed walls, dim with the light of a single candle, had a gray aspect, and seemed to have drawn into their ashiness the dark figure of the Sister, all except the brow with its gold-brown overhanging locks, the rosy cheeks, and deep-red lips; these were conspicuous in the narrow glare of the candle-flame; and below them the open prayer-book and the white hands. The evening was cold, but the fireplace was black. The leaves of the book had not been turned for a long time; the Sister could not be reading. At length she turned the pages rapidly, one after another, as if seeking, in a haphazard fashion, some line or precept that might be nourishing food to the spirit within; but she closed the book without a diligent search. Going to the window, she raised the white cotton shade, and the moonlight fell upon the floor. From where she stood, the young crescent of the moon hung low over the little chapel tower; the naked branches of the maple-trees by the window stretched up and half covered the moon. There was a pathos in the cold world without, with its crescent slowly sinking through the bare branches. The moon had most of her face hid, — you could see that she was turned away weeping. The immovable, upreaching trees did not speak; yet they cried out. The earth beneath was cold; but it was only shivering and comfortless, it was not dead. Nothing in the world outside was dead. There was nothing dead but

this bare white room within, this artificial thing, representing an artificial life, — one that took her away, as it seemed at that moment, even from a freezing, an outcrying, a mournful earth. The figure in black stood long at the window without stirring.

There came a tap at the door. "Come in, Sister Agnes," said Frances, as she turned away from the window; "I know it is you. No one else knocks quite so gently as that."

The door had opened, and Sister Agnes entered. Her form was slight; and her face was a pale and sweet face, with tranquil eyes; and there was a peaceful radiance about it, that bespoke a dwelling very near to heaven, — the bright abode of long-robed, harping, rustling angels, with its central glory; the heaven of our childhood's fancy, our home.

"Sit down, Sister Agnes," continued Frances.

Sister Agnes paused a moment, however, and cast a searching glance upon her companion. Frances blushed under it.

"You have been weeping, Sister," said the visitor, going up to her friend and laying her hands on her arms, while she regarded her face with a troubled look. "What are you sorrowful about to-night?"

No one could have thought the gaze or question intrusive; there was so much love in the speaker's face. The tears started afresh to Frances' eyes.

"Why do you feel bad?" repeated the young Sister.

"I don't know," responded Frances, smiling through her tears. "Because I am foolish."

"That is a very bad reason, and an insufficient one too," returned Sister Agnes. "What is it?"

"It was my mood," returned Frances, absently. Her eyes were fixed on the distance, and the sad look still hung in her face.

As Sister Agnes sat down, she shivered, and looked about at the fireplace. "Why, you have no fire," she said; "this room is too cold."

"No," was the reply, "it is not too cold; it is not cold enough; it will not be cold enough until it can make me so uncomfortable as to keep me from thinking of anything else, — from looking out of doors," she added with a little, bitter laugh.

"I don't understand you," said the Sister, with a puzzled look on her face. "Do you wish to mortify yourself?"

"I do, indeed," replied Frances.

Poor, perplexed Sister Agnes went to the window and looked out. "You should n't look out of the window," she said. "It is a dismally cold night; you must look at more cheerful things."

She still regarded her friend with an inquisitive look.

Sister Frances had quite recovered her composure, and she now said, as she looked her visitor steadily in the face: "I am evading you, Agnes. I tell you candidly, I was lonesome."

"And my coming has stopped that," suggested Agnes, cheerfully.

"No; yes, it has, in one way. I always like to be with you. But I am lonesome now, too, and always, unless I am working."

"But that is most of the time," said Agnes.

"I like to work," returned Frances; "but there is so much about one to distract one's thoughts."

"You mean memories," said Agnes, thinking of Frances' bereavements.

"I don't mean memories altogether. It is something you can't quite touch; a voice that you can hear, without hearing just what it says; something that you cannot quite translate into your own language."

"And you want to get rid of all that?"

"Yes."

"And that is why you have no fire?"

"Yes."

"I don't believe it will hurt you if you don't get rid of it."

"Yes, it will," said Frances, emphatically; but then she stopped. "No, I don't mean that," she added, as she drew herself up a little straighter; "it won't hurt me," — there was a proud suspicion that she might be right and the convent wrong, — "but it is inconvenient at times." She relapsed into her easier posture and muttered, "I will not be annoyed by what does not belong to my work and my mode of life, — if I can help it."

It was her first confession, and a vague one at that, of her maladjustment to the Sisters' life.

One day, soon after, she was driven in the convent wagon to Uncle Luther's house. The wagon left her on the porch and went on to the village. She learned at the door that no one was at home but Miranda, who was somewhere about the grounds and would return to the house soon. Frances seated herself on one of the piazza chairs and waited. She was bending slightly forward, with her face turned upward in an abstracted gaze. An expression of sorrow was on her features, such as came there sometimes when she was alone. She had loosened her stiff black hood and taken it off; but a thin black scarf covered her hair, except in front, where the rebellious gold-brown locks cropped out. The bright color was still in the cheeks, and the large blue eyes were wide open in their far-off look. She sat where the vines, winding up the piazza posts, made a kind of frame about her. It was more than a handsome picture. The sentiment in the face made it a poetic one.

Unperceived by her, Mr. Marsy came sauntering around the corner of the house. When he saw her, he stopped abruptly,— as short as a still-hunter does at his first sight of his deer. He stood still. She still sat musing, betraying her soul's disquietude in her face, as unconscious of human intrusion as browsing game before it detects the huntsman's presence. His eye was fixed intently on the tell-tale, unconscious face. Per-

haps it was his gaze that made her turn her face at last, so that he came within her vision. His steel-gray eyes seemed to her to be reading her soul. She started and stood erect, with flushed face, but dignified in her posture and with a flash of defiance in her eyes. Why should he, or any one, be master of her secret? At the same moment there stole in an inclination toward him; as a noble dog, even the noblest, may like to have a master. As they stood thus confronting each other, Miss Bradbury appeared. His face relaxed into an ordinary expression, and presently Miss Bradbury presented him to her. It was a formal matter. Frances knew very well who he was, but her reception was as distant as if she had not known. As it appeared that she had come on some errand to Miss Miranda, he strolled away a little. In a few minutes the wagon returned and carried the Sister off.

CHAPTER XVI.

A SCHOOL-ROOM AND A PARLOR.

THAT evening the sun at its setting flung a glory over the sky. The brilliancy was voluptuous,— the rich, rosy color reaching up on the light clouds to the zenith. To Frances, standing alone in the convent yard, it seemed as if everything in Nature were voluptuous then, but her Sister's life. As she looked at the flaming heavens, her fancy changed the rich dash of color there into the lavish gesture of some wanton, dashing spirit of the sky, flinging a wide adieu to all as it went on its way. And there she stood still, until the beauteous wave of the arm faded gradually out of the zenith, and night was in the sky.

The vanished brilliancy of the heavens was like that flush across her life, for one moment, that afternoon,— that rush of a sort of spiritual passion while those reading eyes had been on her. But that passion was not for her, a Sister, to keep, any more than the glory of the sunset was hers to keep. She was left to the night,— to the night without and the night within.

She stood at the head of the long avenue of cedars that led down to the road; they stood, in the dusk,

like two rows of guardsmen at present arms, for the expected coming of some queen of theirs, who should dash by with her postilioned coach and cantering outriders. Grave, unimpassioned, rigid, they! No wavering nor doubt there, in the century-old ranks, always erect, devoted to the majesty of their royal household. Scorn they seemed to breathe on all feebleness, all wavering. They — all their life, they had not unbent from their one posture. Let the wind blow, — it did but wave their tops as it might the plumes of grenadiers. Let the snow fall and pile up on their shoulders, — they stirred not, but left it for the sun or breeze to take away when they would. Or if the softness of the moonlight descended and filtered their shadows on the walk below, — did that allure them or turn their eyes either to the right or the left? Go, human mortals, with your variableness! the trees grow straight to but one light.

So they seemed to speak to the Sister and to banish her, as a member of some outer world of vacillation and frivolity.

Yet she laughed even that she was there, — in that outer world; she accepted the place.

The night grew chilly, and she shivered, now and again, with the cold. But she drew her black shawl more closely about her head and shoulders, and went on her promenade, as if physical sensations were distant things. Why should she go back to the whitewashed room, with its dull lead-colored door and window-

frames? What if a fire could be lighted upstairs on the old black andirons and there could be a roaring flame? That was nothing. Oh! only to let the fire burn within one, and not forever quench and stifle it!

She stopped and looked again at the sky. Long lines of deep crimson clouds lay there, with gold edges, above the low hill-tops. Did they not seem to lie one beyond another, like steps to some realm where one was free and not forever under restraint? How little this stiff stone convent behind her should fit in there! How little this hampered life belonged to that heaven where the spirit had free range! Again she turned and walked. When she looked again, the gold had turned to black. Every trace of crimson was gone. Was there any heaven, then, of that sort, after all? "It *was* there," she muttered; "I did see it." Then she smiled and said, "I shall see it again — shall I not?"

She moved on with chattering teeth. It was cold. She pulled the black shawl still closer around her. But in a moment she threw it back and bared her neck to the breeze. What had she to do with warmth, she who was to be cold, — cold-hearted?

The lighted windows in the great stone-house became fewer and fewer. A deeper shadow, in consequence, pervaded the yard. It was quite still. She looked up; the stars were twinkling, — many, many, many of them. In the convent but one window was

alight. She mounted the broad steps and went to her room.

Events came that brought her again and again under that broad vault of the heavens. Soon after Frances had come to the convent, she organized a little school for the children of the oystermen's hamlet. They came regularly to the convent to be taught by her, and she had made it her business to visit their parents and look to their physical needs. One day, Susan Bailey waited until the other children had gone, and then went up to the Sister, as she sat on the platform, and said, "Please, ma'am."

"Yes, Susy, what is it?"

"Father is having a terr'ble time, ma'am." She brought out her words with gasps. "He can't get no work and he is awful cross; and him and mother has hard words, and he gets mad at me and Johnny and Eddy, and we da's n't stay in the house half the time."

"And what about the other children?" asked the Sister, wondering why he should get mad only at Susy and Johnny and Eddy.

"Oh! they are too small, ma'am, — leastways, the baby is; she is very small, you know; and Jimmy, he is lame; and Mary, she helps mother a good deal, and so he don't get so mad at her; but she is small too."

"Do you think he is angry with you because you come to school, and don't help your mother all the time?"

"He says we 're good for nuthin', ma'am."

"Why does he get cross, Susy? Do you know?"

"I don't know exactly, ma'am. He ain't got no work, and he says the landlord, the gentleman over there —"

"Mr. Marsy, you mean?"

"Yes, ma'am, Mr. Marsy. Father says he is going to turn us out of the house, because we don't pay the rent." Susan's face glowed with a sort of satisfaction, as if the notoriety of being likely to be turned out was a great thing.

"Well, run home now, Susy; I will see about it."

The young teacher, seated at her desk, leaned her head upon her hand. Now that the youngsters were gone, preternatural stillness had settled down over the room. Her eyes rested on the blackboard on the wall opposite. Cramped characters were on it, — some of the simple calculations she had given the children to do. These characters now, to her mind, seemed to acquire a pathos, as if they had been tracks, footprints, of childhood that had strayed this way once, but had passed on and never would come again. The empty rows of little wooden chairs, and the desks in front of them, — bare now of the dog's-eared books, of the little slates, the slips of tiger-lilies or syringa, and the half-munched apples, — the absence of the busy little hands, of the rows of shough-heads and simple faces, begot a solemn stillness, so that even the room seemed to regret that its little company was away.

On the teacher's desk, stuck in a small vase, there

was still a spray of syringa, which one of the scholars had brought her in the morning. She would ordinarily have thrown such a token away now, as having done its duty; but to-day, as she sat there, the odor from the blossoms seemed to be a kind of incense from the little giver's soul, — so that the teacher not only let the spray stay in the vase, but touched it tenderly with a sort of caress. She was in need of love, of any little love that might come to her. Even the text-books on her table, well thumbed and worn, which she used in teaching, seemed to have something pathetic about them; every little stain or cut on them marked some moment of attempted honest devotion to duty. And yet some ruthless spiritual Hand would tumble down this inward structure, — as ruthless as the hand that destroys the momentary house of blocks dear to the young heart that has built it.

As if suspecting all at once some unworthy weakness, she quickly rose from her chair and went to the window. It was open, looking out upon the bright June afternoon; upon a stretch of pasture-land, first, then upon the marsh, and beyond that, upon a thicket-covered bank that passed into a wooded and far-receding upland. The sun shone toward her over it all, turning the grass in the pastures to a yellow-green, the patches of water in the marsh to gold, and gilding the tree-tops beyond. The children, on their way home, were still scampering about the pasture, dotting it with their yellow straw hats and calico sunbonnets. At

length they disappeared behind the hill; and then only the landscape was there, peaceful, knowing no doubts; smiling — the landscape — in its innocent life.

With a woe-begone face she stood leaning on the window. It seemed as if some malicious fate were disturbing her life. In will, she had conquered; she had driven from her thoughts, as often as it entered there, that picture of the face with its reading eyes. And now she must be brought face to face with them again, in the very path of her duties!

Yet she shrank from it. She brought up reasons why she should not go to see Mr. Marsy; and against these came counter-reasons why she should, — good, practical reasons, considering the interest of the Baileys; and was not that the matter in hand? But she suspected that the motive of duty was to her a selfish motive going in disguise, — that if she went to see him it would be for her own pleasure. At such moments she determined to stay away and communicate with him by some indirect method. Then there were times when she despised such fear and was for going to him boldly; but even at the moment she was conscious of a fluttering of the heart, of a sense of coming enjoyment. What should she do?

Every minute this undone work was before her. Once, in terror at her own frailty, she resolved to let all investigation go, and pay up the Bailey rent out of her own purse, without seeing the landlord. The next instant she scorned the thought that anybody, anything,

could move her out of an ordinary course of action that her duties called her to; she thought, — it was exalted ground, — whatever were the consequences to herself, she would be true to her Sister's vocation, and visit the landlord of the poor in their behalf, even if that visit were to muddy the current of her own inward life. She laughed, in a kind of ecstasy, at the thought of a devotion to her work that would result in a partial loss of her own self-esteem. Yet even this exaltation would turn to ashes as, in some unguarded hour, she became aware of an undisguised wish to see again the man who had seemed more or less akin to her.

In this confusion of half-made resolves, in this pervading self-distrust, the moment came when she felt at length as if she could no longer remain in indecision. Yet she did not decide. She then only put on her hood, and, going out of the door, strayed about the convent yard. At last she came to the gate. The road outside was deserted. It was a warm summer afternoon. The dust was hot and glaring. It rested on the green by the roadside, making the grass and the bushes look old and rusty. The trees were motionless. Even the birds' voices were hushed. There was complete quiet. If only something would occur to make a decision for her!

She sauntered along toward the Marsy homestead. As far as she would go nothing happened, no person came in sight. It was a dull drifting, — like that of a

vessel floating with the tide. She reached the long fence and the open gateway. She entered the enclosure and went up to the door. The servant did not know whether Mr. Marsy was at home; she went away to find out. Meanwhile the Sister waited in the parlor. The room was darkened. Her heart began to beat fast. The room adjoining was entered through folding-doors, and these were open. It was evidently a room of common use. A large table in the centre was covered with carelessly arranged piles of books and pamphlets; a stand for smoking utensils was also upon it; easy lounging-chairs occupied the space near the table; the walls were lined with bookcases. She glanced down upon the sofa where she was sitting, and saw a riding-whip there; it was actually touching her dress. She started. It was as if the hand of the owner of the whip had touched her. She arose, with half a mind to run away from the house and the yard. Then the servant came in and said that Mr. Marsy was out.

Leaving word that she had called on a matter of business, the Sister went away — in calm. The fearful step had been taken; she had committed herself at last, by her act, to the conclusion of seeing her neighbor. Now her doubts were done with. Erelong she began to smile at her folly, — her past debate. By degrees there came a feeling of disappointment that she had not met him, — a feeling which found relief in a resolve to seek him again at an early opportunity, the earliest.

She came at length to a by-path that would take her back to the convent across the meadows, and there she halted and looked back along the road she had come. It was so still and brown and unchanged, that it seemed to reprove her for her own changefulness. It was constant and faithful to itself. She was unstable, inconstant, without dignity, — at one moment a Sister, at another a woman of the world. The dust of the road had settled on her black attire; as she observed it, the fancy came that it was only illustrative of the way in which the dust of the earth had this afternoon settled upon and soiled her soul.

At that moment Mr. Marsy came in view, walking along the road. She waited for him. By the time he had come near and bowed, the humble manner of a Sister had left her. Her eyes met his; and they were not quite the eyes of a woman weary with the world, — they had a look of softness, of lurking humor, so that a faint sign of a smile crept across Marsy's face as he stood before her.

"How do you do?" she said.

"I am very well, thank you," he replied, still with the lurking smile; "and you?"

"A Sister is always well, — able to do her work. I have just called at your house, — on some business."

"Have you?" he said; "pray come in; it is too hot for you to stand here and talk of it."

She went with him up the path to the piazza, and there they sat down.

"It is about Bailey, a tenant of yours," said she, "who I am told is behind in his rent."

Although that was a matter-of-fact speech, it came from a person whose face suggested that there were other matters of fact, nearer at hand, which were also interesting.

"Bailey? Bailey?" said Marsy, pondering, his attention taken up with the provoking face before him; "I don't remember any such case." Then he knitted his brow and seriously reflected. "Upon my soul, I can't recall anything of it."

"Possibly I have been misinformed," said she, with a slight vein of sarcasm in her tone. "I am somewhat interested in his family, and my information came from them; it must be correct."

"Ah! would you mind," he said suddenly, "coming in for a moment? I may be able to trace it by looking over a few papers."

"If it would assist in settling the matter, I will with pleasure."

They went in; and she sat where she had sat before, beside the riding-whip. In a few minutes he came in, bringing a package of papers. He pulled one from them and opened it.

"Here," he said, "appears to be a memorandum of letting to George Bailey a certain house and lot, down by the shore, I should imagine. It is dated several years ago. I don't think I have seen it since then."

"Do you think that is the lease he owes you on?"

"I — I presume so," he answered. "I — to tell the truth, Mrs. Hiller, — I beg pardon, Sister Frances, — I don't know that you would understand it unless I told you the precise state of things." He sat opposite her, and picking up the whip, began switching the air absent-mindedly with it. "I imagine," he said, raising his eyes to hers at last, "that those people down there don't have much money to spare, — children enough, but no money, — and I have n't paid any attention to these papers. If any man came with some money, I took it and gave him a receipt. But I never set about collecting rents." He paused and looked at her.

"A rather unusual landlord, I should think."

There was something in her tone that made the color come in his face. He took a turn up and down the room. "I don't want to screw them down to the last penny," he said; "I don't grudge them the ground. Let them get some freedom."

That was the word, — "freedom;" that was what he said. Frances was still a moment. Then she arose and held out her hand and said, with a double meaning in her own mind, "You seem to have a fellow-feeling with mortals." Then she looked up at him with a smile, as he still held her hand, and said, "There is nothing more for me to say, then."

"Nothing; I won't ask for any rent."

"I want to make a man of him," she interposed doubtingly.

"And *make* him pay?"

"Yes. Good-by!"

As he came into the house again, he muttered, "You might make a man of many another;" and then went to find Aleck.

CHAPTER XVII.

JOHN MARSY ASSISTS A TENANT.

THE next morning after Sister Frances' call, Marsy went down to the oystermen's village. These subtle influences of woman, that steal in on us like the delicate scent of roses and weave around our mental being, by some magic, a poetic and fanciful atmosphere, which we inhale to our gentle intoxication, so that the memories of the female presence are sweet, so that the rustle of its gown against our person has been a kind of a sacred touch and the look of the feminine eye resting on our face has raised in us a wakeful knowledge of something good, — these subtle influences from Sister Frances' visit it was, that took George Bailey's landlord down to have a look at the tenement over which a cloud of rent was hanging unpaid. It was a bright morning, and Marsy was very well content with himself, as he crossed the fields, with a sense of nearness to the black-garbed figure, as if the black frock were rustling against him now, the gold-brown locks fluttering in the very same whiff of air that fanned his brow, and the blue eyes were looking off on the same pleasing outlook that met his own; in spirit, he knew, she was accompanying him on this errand.

In a few minutes he had entered upon the straggling road that wound among the helter-skelter of cottages, — some neat and flower-grown, old, picturesque structures, some of uninteresting mediocrity, and some new and dirty. An oysterman is an independent sort of fellow who works for nobody but himself, — with a bed of his own (an oyster-bed, I mean) and a boat of his own, and cruising as he may list; he is an individual in his work.

Yes, it was a bright morning, undoubtedly. From this meadow-bluff, — meadow for all but the irregular notchings into it of the oystermen's homestead sites, — with its occasional hickory or oak and its myriad stems of timothy and red clover, there was stretched out to the southward the broad sheet of the Sound, — it too with its myriad ripples and wavelets and its occasional growth of a schooner; while, down at your feet, on a pebbly beach that was not scant in oyster-shells, — this is the workaday side of the picture, — there were yawls drawn up, canted on their bilge as if tired of resting on their bottoms, and here and there a sharpie dismasted, her sails and masts lying along the cockpit; it was but a very few hours of the day these vessels were not in use, and it took too much time to leave them at anchor and pull out to them; yet there were those, too, that swung at their dainty cables. Ah, yes, a bright, busy thing, — this oyster industry!

So thought Marsy, as he took in the morning air on the bluff. But that was neither here nor there. Where

was Bailey's? Naturally, he looked for some thriftless abode, that went with non-payment of rent, with hard times; undoubtedly Bailey was having hard times. Hitting upon a likely specimen of poor home near by, he went on toward it. In front of the ragged picket-fence that hedged in this dwelling, was a wood-pile; nothing very respectable in the way of a wood-pile, but a collection of small dead and crooked limbs that no one would accept for cord-wood, interpersed with water-logged flotsam cast upon the shore and carried home by Bailey, — timbers now drying out in the sun. Marsy was obliged to pass this wood-pile before entering the gate. But he had no sooner turned its last corner than he was pounced upon by a figure that caught his arms and shoulders and held them as if in a vise. He looked and saw that it was Ebenezer Green. A moment later, Green looked and saw that his captive was John Marsy. He released his hold and drew a long breath. "Well," he said, "I never was more surprised in my life."

"Nor I," returned Marsy.

"Why, I thought it must be him, of course."

"Who?"

Green held up his finger in token of silence, and then shading his mouth with his hand, whispered, "Bailey!"

The wood-pile was two deep, so to speak, — that is, it consisted of two rows; and the back row overlapped the front one, and screened Ebenezer from view from the house.

"What do you want of Bailey?" asked Marsy.

Green threw back his coat, and exhibited to him the shield of his constabulary office.

"What has he been doing?" inquired Marsy.

The constable gazed into his eye for a moment, and a doubting look came over his face. "No, no," he said, "that ain't business;" and he seated himself on a log of wood in the angle, and became wholly occupied with a view of the Sound.

"But what made you jump at me so?" asked Marsy, who had not yet altogether recovered from the sudden interruption of his peaceful errand.

"Ah, ha!" chuckled Ebenezer; "you don't ketch me nappin' with a man like Bailey to handle; he 's a tough one, he is! Fust come, fust served, is my motto with him; hit fust. I regret I made the mistake."

As Marsy's business was with George Bailey, it is likely he would have waited somewhere to see the result of his arrest. But he had betrayed Ebenezer's place of concealment. Mrs. Bailey, having beheld Marsy approach, was surprised not to see him issue from behind the wood-pile, and had some natural curiosity to know what he was doing there. So she tentatively approached the gate on tiptoe. Arrived there, no one was to be seen. With a bold step, she came through the gate, expecting to see Mr. Marsy next, down on the beach below the bluff. To her great astonishment, he was at her elbow with Ebenezer Green.

"It 's all up now," said Ebenezer, in a tone of

mingled disgust and desperation. "There 's no use trying the arts, the finish, in a village like this. Here I 've sot on that there log ever sence seven o'clock this mornin' to do the thing up slick; and now what 's it come to? — Where 's your husband?" he suddenly demanded of Mrs. Bailey, in a savage tone.

"Here I be," growled an equally savage voice behind Ebenezer's back.

The constable started with infinite quickness. There was no one pluckier in town than Ebenezer Green, when he was in a fight of his own making, — when his blood was up; but this handling his fellow-villagers as an arm of the law, without having the slightest personal ill-will against them, — that was all against the Green grain; and his nerves were tried, every time he had a warrant against the person to execute. He was entirely discomfited by this sudden appearance of Bailey. His official character forsook him. "Why, hallo, Bailey! good-mornin'!" he said, holding out his hand to shake from sheer force of habit.

"I don't want your hand," answered Bailey; "what are you hangin' round my house for? Do you want me?"

"Yes," replied Ebenezer, scratching his head in thoughtfulness, "I do."

"That row with th' other boat, I s'pose," muttered Bailey.

"Yes," returned the constable, doubtfully; "petit larceny."

"Petit larceny be damned!" growled the culprit. "You want to take me to the jedge, I s'pose."

"Oh, George!" broke out his wife, in a wail that bespoke a sadly tried heart; "what shall we do now?" She covered her face with her apron, and resting her elbows on the fence sobbed and sobbed.

Bailey fidgeted. "Keep still, Jennie!" he said. "I 'll come out of this soon."

Green looked troubled. "Don't believe it," he said; "have to go to jail, default of bonds, till next sessions."

"Hold on, Green," said Marsy; "don't be so fast. Bailey may have friends."

Ebenezer turned round on him with dropped jaw. Then he compressed his lips. "Impossible, sir! impossible! Bailey ain't got no more friends than a mosquito."

"Yes, he may have," rejoined Marsy, speaking with an assumed air of indifference; "what did I hear? Sister Frances at the convent is his friend, is she not?"

"Eh?" said Bailey, looking in astonishment.

"Sister Frances at the convent."

"Oh! she as teaches the children; yes, yes. Oh! she 's a good woman."

"Will Sister Frances help ye?" cried Jennie, tearfully.

"Hush, Jennie!" said Bailey; "don't be a fool; do you think I can't take care of myself?"

"Don't turn off good-natured help," said Marsy.

"Oh, I 've had my fight in this village," returned Bailey, "and I 'll have it yet; and old Bayne 'll run before I will, — though I ain't got many friends, as the constable says. Come on, officer, let 's go along."

A great weight was taken off Ebenezer's mind at this exhibition of willingness on Bailey's part; and the trio started off for the "jedge's."

The "jedge" was none other than Luther Bradbury, Justice of the Peace; and he held court in his own house. "Well, what 's this?" he asked, as the three gentlemen presented themselves. "Are you back with your warrant, Green?"

"Yes, sir; I have made the arrest."

"This is Bailey, is it? — Bailey, what have you got to say for yourself?"

"I ain't heard yet, sir, what anybody else has got to say of me."

Luther took the affidavit up and read: "'That on said twentieth day of May' — that 's to-day, — 'said Bailey came with his boat above the oyster-beds of said Bayne, between three and four o'clock in the morning, and did then and there begin wrongfully to dredge said Bayne's oysters, and did dredge the same in considerable quantity to the value of at least four dollars; that thereupon the servants of said Bayne, these deponents, being also in a boat, did approach said Bailey's boat and found oysters stowed therein, and did then and there seize

said boat, and attempt to tow it to land; that said Bailey did then and there raise an oar and strike one of these deponents, to wit, Job Stone, and knocked him out of the boat into the water; that the other of these deponents, to wit, James Vincent, did then seize said Stone to haul him into the boat to keep him from drowning; that, while engaged in said act, the said Bailey did raise his oar, and strike said Vincent therewith and knocked him into the water also; that these deponents did then climb into their boat again, but by that time said Bailey, with his boat, had disappeared; that these deponents were severally bruised by said blows to their bodily hurt; and that, to the best of their information and belief, the said Bailey kept and still keeps for his own use said oysters of said William Bayne.'" Luther stopped reading. "Now, then, Bailey, what have you got to say?"

"It 's a lie, sir, — I guess," said Bailey.

"You *guess!*" said Mr. Bradbury.

"Yes, sir; that 's what I said."

Luther paused a moment. "Do you want to make a deposition?"

"Swear, you mean?"

"Yes."

"No, sir; I don't think I do."

"I 'll have to put you under bonds, then, and commit you, if you don't furnish them, — bonds to keep the peace, and bonds to appear for trial."

"How much are they?" asked Bailey.

"Five hundred for one and five hundred for the other."

Bailey smiled. "That 's too much for me."

"I 'll be his bondsman," spoke up Marsy; "I don't know Bailey much, but I don't believe he 'll run away; he is my tenant, any way."

Luther appeared a little surprised, but made out the bonds.

Bailey was still more surprised; dumfounded, in fact. "Why, I have n't paid you any rent in four years," he said to Marsy, as they came out. He looked at his bondsman wonderingly, as if unable to comprehend the situation. He had gone so long without paying rent, that he felt like a poacher, as if Marsy might come along and put him out at any time; consequently he had conceived of him as an enemy. Suddenly to see him act the friend was such a reversal that it made Bailey scratch his head in perplexity; the more, because everybody else here in Marshton seemed to be looking askant at him nowadays. "I don't see to the bottom of this here," he said, standing awkwardly before Marsy, preparatory to a parting word; "that Sister," jerking his thumb toward the convent "was the only one I knowed took an interest in *us*."

"She spoke to me about you."

"Well, that 's a hoss of another color."

"What was the fact about that oyster fight?" asked Marsy.

"Well, upon my soul, I don't know. I hit 'em, of course I hit 'em. I knowed who they was, — spies o' Bayne's; who else is goin' to hang round in a boat at three o'clock in the mornin'? I knowed that without askin'. If the darned fools had n't be'n standin' up in their boat, they would n't ha' gone overboard."

"It looked bad, you know, for you to be out yourself at that time of night."

"Look here, Mr. Marsy," rejoined Bailey, in a tone of confidence, "I 'll tell ye somethin'. Everybody did n't know it; but I guess it 's got to come out now. You know where Bayne's beds lie? — not exactly, no. Well, it don't make no difference. This is the p'int. Right alongside o' his beds there 's a nat'ral oyster-bed. He don't know it, nor anybody else. But I struck on it. Well, sir, me and my family 's be'n livin' on that there bed for some weeks; there 's a reg'lar heap of oyster-shells in my back-yard. Now, what was the use o' givin' that away? S'pose I 'd gone out there a-dredgin' by daylight? There 'd be'n papers filed for that bed in the town-clerk's office quicker 'n you could say Jack Robinson. Bayne, he was n't smart enough to find it out. A man that 's scratchin' hard for his livin' finds these things out first. If Bayne 'd had to go out and ketch his own blackfish for his dinner, he might ha' stumbled acrost it. Well, I did n't have no money to pay for surveyin' and filin' papers. Do you see now? That 's why I went dredgin' by night. Now, you remember, I said to Jedge Bradbury that that

af'davit was a lie, I *guessed.* You know, there 's tides; an' I wan't anchored; an' my oysters was alongside o' Bayne's; an' whether I drifted on to his'n, I don't know, — I don't, an' I never can find out; nor he, either; it was too dark a night. I — I 'll tell ye the truth; I wan't pertickler whether I did drift on to his'n or not. I did n't try to, but I did n't take no pains to find out; an' when them fellers come alongside, why, I know'd right off what it was; an' I was mad. It meant the end o' my oyster-livin'."

There was nothing so very bad in all this. Marsy thought he saw through the case. They had reached the gate to his house. "Sit down here, Bailey," he said; he thought he could lend a hand to him and to Sister Frances at the same time. "I tell you what I will do. You are willing to work?"

"Yes, sir."

"And your household expenses are heavy."

"Sir?"

"You 've a large family."

"Six."

"Never mind; they 'll soon grow up, and will make it more comfortable for you." So, attempting to ease Bailey's mind, Marsy went on: "I will do this: I will give you a deed of your house, and you can pay me by instalments."

"Can't do it, sir," said Bailey, firmly; "never could do it; no use."

"Listen," said Marsy. "We will lay out that oyster-

bed and record it in your name. I will pay the charges, and you can pay me back out of the profits on your oysters. You 'll go into the trade, you know."

The picture to Bailey's mind of his holding the proprietorship of oyster-beds, of leading a capitalized life, and going out in broad daylight to dredge, and selling and getting money, — the picture of that establishment of himself in life was a trifle too much for him, this black sheep of Marshton. There was a vicious tug at a dandelion root that came up spinning and was sent out into the road.

"Until you 're fairly started, you can get work on the farm, you know."

"Joslyn won't hire me," said he.

"He will if I say so," returned Marsy.

"Yes, if you say so. It seems a good many things 'll happen, if you say so. I don't know why things is settlin' on me so. I was took up this mornin', an' now I 'm a merchant, as good as any of 'em, an' can look Bayne in the face, an' any man besides; an' I 'm ownin' a house too. Here 's my hand, Mr. Marsy; I can't give you nothin' else; but you hev that as long as I live."

Before Marsy could speak, Bailey had wrenched his hand away again and was walking off smartly down the road, and muttering to himself, in disgust, "A big baby!" though that consisted in having the merest film of moisture in his eyes.

Such was the coil that Marsy stumbled against in

this Bailey matter. If Bailey had been the worst of rascals, Marsy would have stood by him for Sister Frances' sake, — oh, yes, quite decidedly Sister Frances was a factor in this matter. But with Bailey showing signs of manliness, it was tolerably clear sailing. His arch enemy, too, was none of the best. Marsy did not like him; and it must be said there was, indeed, some mystery about Bayne, — a comparatively recent settler in Marshton, who was rich and only cultivated oysters for fun, as part of a fancy place. The gossips who had poked their heads through the palings of his history, as it were, to see what they could see, had drawn them out again, only to shake them ominously. But Bayne's riches very quickly clipped the wings of these shady rumors and tumbled them to the ground. He acted now, at least, like a respectable citizen, and was honored of Mr. Clerkenwell, to whose parish he belonged. Beside, there was a more potent source of popularity in his being the father of Miss Julia Bayne, who was by all accounts — probably taking after her deceased mother — a girl of most charming character; to the possession of whose hand Parks had the hardihood to aspire.

All in all, Marsy thought he was on the right road, and went to tell Sister Frances so. That good angel of the oystermen came down to see him in the convent parlor. It was years since Marsy had been there; not since he was a boy. The black crucifix on the mantel-piece had impressed him with awe then; and he had thought the furniture remarkably hard and scant,

reminding him of the severity of his school-room. But it became a living, solemn hymn of a place, when the Sister brushed in, with a smile on her face. He recounted the proceedings of the forenoon.

"That was very good of you," she said, as he frankly stated what he had done.

"Not at all," said he, "I took no risks. I am surer to get my instalments on the house than I was to get the rent. I know he will do a full day's work on the farm; and the oyster-bed venture will advance his respectability and make him the less likely to go away and forfeit my bail bond."

"Ah, yes, I see," she replied; "you were very shrewd for your own interests."

He laughed.

"Why don't you say you did it for the sake of doing him good, and put off this affectation?"

"It would n't be telling the whole truth."

She looked at him a moment; and turned away in displeasure.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WASHING-DAY AT THE BAILEYS'.

Do the milestones go by slowly on our journey? Are you impatient to be at the end of your travels? Do you complain that we stop at too many stations on the way? Alas! I confess that I like to go sauntering through the country in this way. I am too old-fashioned, perhaps. But, really, I have no desire to transport you, like magic, from one end of the story to the other, and, as you alight from your car, to stand quite spruce, with a smirk and a patronizing air, as if to say, "You see, ladies and gentlemen, how neatly and quickly it is done." No. Our milestones may go by slowly, but I don't see how we can skip any of them; and as for skipping the stations, I assure you that I have cut off every one that we could possibly spare.

I mentioned magic just now. I do not relish that element. I fancy no legerdemain in my art. I have no aspiration to be an illusionist. A simple examination of the human characters that flit across our vision about Marshton is all I have in view. Do not think that George Bailey is set up here for a hero in low life. I have no wish to touch him with a wand and make him

something different from what he is, — shrewd, surly, independent, with a keen sense of injustice, and not above a feeling of friendship when he is well used. He held the cards in his own hand, when it came to the trial.

It was plain to the dullest mind, that no human being could tell just where Bailey was when Stone and Vincent made their appearance; and as it could not be made to appear that he was a trespasser, the alleged assault and battery with the oar turned out to be a matter of self-defence. The case for the accused was strengthened by the evidence of the adjacent natural oyster-bed; and he went forth scot-free of every charge except that of dredging by night, for which he was fined, — but not without the impression left on many minds, that somehow, not having a savory reputation, he had outwitted the law and stolen a march on Bayne. Sister Frances' indirect connection, too, with the case became whispered around, and occasioned some critical comment from older heads than hers, and added a little flavor to the social cup of tea, — "Very fine drawing, this of yours, Mrs. Bowers;" the rich morsel under the tongue was not detected as the inspirer of Mrs. Bowers' drawing.

It was the further fact, too, that whereas, in the natural course of things, Mr. Marsy and the Sister would have had nothing to do with each other, beyond a chance glance once in two months, they now met not infrequently over this devoted household.

For Frances had her part to do. For instance, Mrs. Bailey's health proved unequal to the washing; and the Sister helped her on that. The little yard, half bare, half plantain-grown, in front of the cottage, with its few stray, unthrifty-looking chickens; its well-curb, doing double duty for this house and the next; its cistern, with the long wooden hook, and the tin pail for drawing up the water; the rude bench alongside the house whereon the tubs were stood for the summer-day washing, — this yard, with two or three of the children scampering about in it at play, backed by the drab cottage with its low eaves, and its figured, half-rolled paper curtain in the best window, — this yard was nowadays, on a Monday, the scene of Sister Frances' labors at Jennie's wash-tubs.

It was on her second Monday that Frances was at work here. Her hood was gone. The scarf usually inseparable from her head was gone. The upper portion of her black garment was gone. It left her neck and shoulders bare and her arms bare. Jupiter! they were pretty arms! how beautifully rounded! and her shoulders, — we can only guess about them, because she has pinned a little black and white shawl of Jennie's about her neck. The plentiful brown hair perched up in a knot on the crown of her head; and her demure black gown, — that is hitched up somehow in washerwoman fashion, so that the wearer looks rough-and-ready, like a man with his trousers rolled up.

This was the picture — Sister Frances rubbing away

over a wash-tub, and Jennie hanging clothes on the line — that Graham and Marsy saw, as they drove up in front of the cottage. Sister Frances was so busy and making so much noise, that she did not see the visitors until Marsy was at the gate, when, having fished some of the clothes out of the tub, she turned round with them in her hands, preparing to wring them. Her face was flushed with her work; but she did not blush nor exhibit the least discomposure as she saw them. "What are you doing here?" she said to Marsy rather sternly, as he approached and doffed his hat.

"Why, I beg pardon," he said; "but we were driving this way, and Mr. Graham said he would like a glass of water. May I trouble you or Mrs. Bailey for a glass?"

"I don't believe you stopped for that," said Frances, hanging the clothes on the edge of the tub as she looked him in the eye, and then went into the house for a glass. She brought it out, and he went to the well and filled it, while she desisted from her work. When he had handed the glass to Graham he came into the yard again and said, "Would you mind meeting Mr. Graham? He has heard about you and would like to be introduced."

She hesitated a moment.

He noticed it and added: "As you probably know, he is n't very long for this world. You may depend upon it, he is quite sincere. The fact is, when we were driving by and saw you here, he asked me then if I

thought it would do. That is why we stopped. I am sure it would gratify him. It is n't an ordinary favor."

There was more of solemnity in Marsy's eyes than the Sister had often seen there; and she followed him out to the road, shielding her face from the sun with her hand, as she looked up at the helpless figure in the wagon. Graham took off his hat. "Mr. Graham," said she, speaking first. His face was so pale and thin, and serious in its expression, that she felt as if it was she who should make the advance. "I have heard of you often, and have seen you before; I am very glad to know you."

"Thank you," said he; "of course I have heard of you through my friend. But I did not know," he added, "that you were so thorough in your efforts here," nodding toward the cottage, "as you seem to be."

"I had to be," she said, "or give it up; and it was rather early for that."

Just then Jimmy Bailey, a hapless youngster of the family, who was afflicted with a hip disease and went hobbling about — in the best of spirits, however — on a single crutch, came up to the carriage and clamored to be allowed to carry back the glass which Graham was now holding in his hand.

"Is this one of them?" he inquired.

"Yes," said Frances, smiling.

"Can I carry the tumbler back, please?" prayed Jimmy, balancing himself on the crutch as if he were

as used to it as to a sound leg, and holding up his hand.

Graham gave it to him, and he hobbled off with it, using his crutch in such a lively way that he went as fast as an ordinary child could run. Graham followed him with an amused look. "He is a brother of mine," he said; "but I have got a long start of him."

Why should a Sister be so impressible? There was that moisture in her eyes again.

Marsy noticed it.

"Come, Aleck," he shouted in a lively voice, hopping into the carriage as briskly as possible; "we must be off;" and they bade adieu to the Sister, who had retreated behind the gate.

That was the last drive Graham ever took.

CHAPTER XIX.

GRAHAM'S SURRENDER.

As castaway, artificial objects come, in their desuetude on the ground, to be grown up about with vegetation, — the grass reaching up and covering them, — so the inward life of our friend Graham, having come to a sort of stand-still in his weakening state, had come to be encircled and day by day more overgrown with memories of his earlier years. Gradually he had become less talkative, gradually more grave. His companion was scarcely able to notice the progress. As gently and delicately as the growth of plants, these recollections cropped up and imparted a sort of softness to his stanch tranquillity; but still with no more effect than to make him the more quiet.

Meantime the gossamer-like partition that had kept this near neighbor apart from the Sister of Charity across the way — gossamer-like, for the places were so near that they had often seen each other's faces in driving, while he knew of her from Marsy — had finally been punctured and rent by the casual meeting at the Bailey cottage. It is possible that if this veil had not been rent by chance, it would have been removed, erelong,

by deliberate act. For Aleck, like many another manly fellow, had the tender side to his nature. It was a mother and a sister — the sister already mentioned here — who had from his early childhood made up his family circle. An atmosphere of feminine tenderness hung over the memory of his early life, and extended down into his time of manhood, until it was finally lifted by the departure of the sister, — that occasion of his return to his old chum Marsy. In the general softening that came now with his less power of resistance, he felt as if it would be a luxury if some womanly presence were about him, if some woman's fingers were to hand him his glass of water, some feminine hand smooth his pillow. At first it struck him as a silly, childish notion; and he turned away from it to his masculine peace, of iron acceptance. Still, the idea preyed upon him; and one day in September, when he had been above a month in his bed, he told it to Marsy, with shamefacedness.

"What do you think of it, John?" he asked with a sheepish smile.

But Marsy was in no mood to deny his friend anything; and he saw, by the expectant light in the invalid's eye, that he really hoped for a reversal of his own judgment upon his wish.

"I think it is perfectly feasible," he answered, summoning all the quickness of thought he was capable of to a practical arrangement.

"It may be practicable," rejoined Graham, "but is

it proper? — for me, I mean; had n't I better get along without it?"

"What is the use of that?" said Marsy; "if it would be a comfort to you, a luxury, why should n't you have it, like any other luxury, as long as it is obtainable and not beyond your means? You ought to be sensible about it, Aleck, and not get squeamish. Keep your head cool, my boy."

With these words the sick man was reassured. He asked at length, "What are you going to do?"

"What are *you* going to do?" returned Marsy; "I mean, what do you want me to do?"

"I will tell you whom I had in mind," said Aleck, diffidently. It was hard for him to utter, even to his old friend, any confession of liking of this sort. But he put on a bold front finally, as if the only way he could speak was to speak without showing any shame of what he said. He looked Marsy squarely in the face, and answered, "I would rather have Mrs. Hiller than any one else." He watched Marsy's face for a moment after he spoke, and then continued: "She and you are good friends, and I feel as if through you, through you, John, she were a friend of mine. I like what you have told me of her. I think I should like her here. It would be a kind of a friendly circle, — we three; the least disturbance to what there is now that I can think of. I don't want to disturb that."

It was more than he had ever said in the way of sentiment. There was a movement of his hand under the

bed-clothes, as if he were going to extend it to his old companion in proof of his friendship. But it did not get outside.

Graham's request was conveyed to Sister Frances by Marsy, who called at the convent for the purpose. She was considerably agitated when the message was given her. As she stood confronting her visitor, the color mounted up to her temples, and her lips trembled a little; whether they trembled with nervous excitement merely, or with a sense of something touching in the invalid's request, we cannot tell. Her lips parted once or twice, as if she were going to speak; but she closed them again. "I cannot answer you yet," she finally said; "let me think." She turned away a moment and stood with her back to Marsy. At length she came back and said: "I must see our head Sister, Ambrosia, first; but it will not be long; I will send you an answer this afternoon. It is an unusual duty, under all the circumstances; and I think I ought, at least as a matter of deference, to consult her. But I wish to tell you that I feel honored by Mr. Graham's request;" and here the color again overspread her forehead. "I feel very much honored," she repeated; "and I wish you would not give him any report of the result of your call, until I send you a definite answer."

It was only a general feeling of prudence that caused her determination to consult Sister Ambrosia before sending her final answer. After she had somewhat composed herself, she went to the head Sister's

apartment and tapped on the door. The Sister within bade her enter, and she went in and sat down beside her. Sister Ambrosia was making a sick-bed gown for some poor woman.

"Sister Ambrosia," said Frances, after a moment, "I wish to consult you about a matter that has come up; not that I myself think it is a doubtful case; but it is a little unusual, and I thought it would be more respectful and perhaps polite to you to speak to you before I gave an answer."

"What is it, my dear?" asked the benevolent-looking superior, as she raised her eyes over her spectacles to glance at the young Sister by her side.

"Mr. Graham, Mr. Marsy's friend, is very ill, as you know. He has no family; the last member of it, his sister, died when he came here to live with his old friend. Mr. Marsy says he is getting weak, and he seems to miss a woman's hand in the way of doing things about his room. He has said to Mr. Marsy that he wished I would go and see him. I suppose he knows about me through my relatives here, and I happened to meet him a while ago. What do you think of it? I am inclined not to refuse."

Sister Ambrosia went on with her work, holding up two pieces of cloth to get the edges even, preparatory to basting. At length she laid down the pieces, and again looking over her spectacles, this time a little more searchingly, at Frances, asked, "Why should you not go?"

"Perhaps I was too cautious," she answered. "Those two bachelors live there alone, except for their housekeeper, and I thought I would get your concurrence first."

"That is right, my dear. But he is not going to get well, is he?"

"No," said Frances, shaking her head.

"Go by all means, Sister. It matters not to us to do anything but our Sisters' duty, wherever called. That is your armor and your vocation. Your calling will keep you sacred wherever you go in it."

Frances was silent a moment. Whatever mixed emotion she may have been under on other occasions where Marsy was concerned, there was but singleness of feeling here. She was conscious of only one motive now, in going to his house; and that was, to fill as far as she could the place of the sister who was wanting at Graham's side. It was her recognition of this feeling in herself that kept her silent after Sister Ambrosia had ceased speaking. But as the elder Sister took up her work again, Frances said in a deeper tone than usual, "Yes, Sister, our calling will keep me sacred there."

"God bless you in your ministration!" said Sister Ambrosia; and drawing her young companion to her, kissed her forehead.

Early in the afternoon Frances brought a definite answer to Marsy, by going in person to make her first visit.

The house was very still, when the Sister was admitted. She had not been there since that call on Mr. Marsy. There was no doubt in her mind now; nothing but the strength of performing her mission. When Marsy came out and met her, her eyes looked into his with as little self-consciousness as if he had been her brother. "Come this way, please, Sister," said he; and he led her up the stairs to Graham's room. There was a flutter in her heart, as she stood for an instant before that door, — before that admission to the solemnity of a departing life; she almost distrusted her capability of performing her part well, and an unspoken appeal for strength and intelligence went upward. The door opened, and the two went in. It was the sick-room, the solemn chamber. And yet, from the moment of her entrance into it, Frances did not feel it to be solemn, not phantasmagorically solemn. Heartiness and courage came from every quarter of it; as if the nerve-giving invalid had spread the quality of his spirit through it all. He smiled at her brightly as she came in; as if he had been quite well, and she were not more of a ministering spirit than any well-formed, well-countenanced young woman may always be.

"I am glad to see you," he said; and he held out his hand to her and shook hers warmly.

So much warm welcome almost unnerved her, and she took the chair that Marsy offered, rather tremblingly, while she took off her hood and pushed back

the scarf. There those yellow-brown ringlets cropped out, over her forehead; and with that pink, reposeful face of hers, and the calm blue eyes, she was enough, herself, to provoke heartiness in Graham.

"*You* do not look ill," he said.

"No," she replied, a little startled by the directness of his speech, and blushing.

"I will leave you awhile, Aleck," spoke up Marsy; "I have some work to finish downstairs."

Graham was silent for a few moments after he left, while a graver look stole over his face. At last he turned to her and said inquiringly, "You were surprised that I sent for you?"

"I was, in one way," she said; "I am quite unequal, in my own thought, to being of much service to you."

He held up his hand. "Don't say that. You make me think, ever so much, of a sister I once had. That is n't very flattering, is it? But if a woman was like her, she would be a very good woman. There is something in faces. One can tell. Now, I am very solemn. I know I am going to die." His eyes were fixed on her face.

"That is not so bad," said she, firmly; "only it ought not to come so soon."

"That is past," he replied; "I have accepted that."

They were both silent for a few moments.

"But I don't take it till it comes," he added at length. "Between now and then, I am in life; I am human, on the earth. One's thoughts naturally go

backward at such a time, — when one is physically unable to move about. I have to think; and I have all my old home life, — in my mind. If you are here, you will be bringing it back in a kind of reality. I don't want you to be lugubrious with me."

She smiled a little bit, and said, "I could n't; I can be serious with you, — serious in being your nurse and in being — your friend." She held out her hand to him impulsively, — she must always be emotional, — and he struck it frankly with his own, as he would have struck friendship with a boy at school by a hand-shake; and he held it a moment, and tears came into his eyes, but not into hers. There was the Sister's strength behind her emotion.

"A woman's hand is new to me," he said.

That was the commencement of all Aleck's unfettered confidences to her about his early life, his young family recollections, his hopes and aspirations as a lad, and how they had all worked out to this end. It was a story of strength and tenderness.

The September days slipped away with their dull, hazy, enervating weather, and October came, with its brilliant foliage. The month was dry and warm; no frost came until near its close. The scent of the dead leaves, which the light breezes scarcely blew away from under the trees where they had fallen, arose and floated into the chamber windows of the old Marsy homestead. Sister Frances came and saw her patient every day. There was no exhibition of embarrassment on her

part. She went about her office of filling a real sister's place, as plainly and unaffectedly as if Graham really had been her brother. This friendly womanly presence softened him a little; so that he did not find it hard to give her his confidence and to talk to her about his life and himself as he had never talked to any one before, but Marsy.

She was still teaching her school, and still had Mrs. Bailey in training. Graham was much concerned, in an amused way, about his lively young friend Jimmy. Frances always brought some story about the youngster; and one day, at Graham's request, she brought Jimmy, washed very clean, himself. The lad was not at all abashed at being brought into the chamber, but met the invalid with so much readiness and yet decency of answer, and was so bright, that Graham said it was as cheerful as having a cricket on the hearth; so that after a while it came about that Jimmy paid his daily visits without company, — hobbling up the drive to the house and upstairs to the sick man's room, in a quick cheery way, that always brought a smile to the faces of both Graham and Marsy.

So there was nothing very mournful, — on the surface, — after all, in these last days of Aleck's life. Frances' coming seemed to have supplied a want whose seriousness he had hardly fully estimated. It seemed to give him a new life in his heart.

But in the early part of November he grew much weaker. The household began to wear that anxious

look that foreruns a death. Joslyn the farmer, who scarcely understood his relation to Mrs. Hatfield the housekeeper, — not being able to decide whether he was above her or below her or on her level, and having for that reason abstained from conversation with her, — now made advances, and with solemn visage wished to know how Mr. Graham was. The stable-boy, who brought up the wood for the fireplace, trod timidly across the chamber, with only a sidelong glance at the sick man, until he was startled half out of his senses by Graham's weak, but friendly, "Good-morning, Tom; how are the horses to-day?" — which would draw him finally into a brief conversation. Even the terrier looked distressed. Ever since Graham had ceased to sit on the piazza, the dog had been in the habit of coming upstairs and squatting down at a little distance from the side of the bed; and there, knowing too much to bark, he would sit in a keen gaze at the prostrate figure as if he were demanding of it to rise and come downstairs; and when that was not done, he would go off in a corner and lie down; but he became a constant occupant of the room, and kept a sharp eye on all that went on. The cat, poor thing! not being accustomed to, nor permitted, the inside of the house, used to go rubbing her sides up against the piazza posts and the legs of the piazza chair where Graham used to be, — getting what comfort she could out of that. The whole household was more unbalanced than Graham himself.

At last the time came, however, when his rugged will could no longer confine his feelings. But it was only at the very last. The November evening was chilly, and a fire was smouldering on the hearth. The patient seemed to be failing, and Frances had sent word to Sister Ambrosia that she might not be back that night. A dim light was given to the room by a couple of candles. After a slumber, Graham awoke and seemed quite himself, but very weak. He looked around the room. No one was there but Marsy. "John!" he called. Marsy came over to him. "I think it is time for me to say good-by, old fellow," he said in a calm voice, but with a distressed and serious look on his face. His hands were under the bed-clothes. With difficulty he withdrew his right one and held it out to his friend, grasping Marsy's as well as he could; and it was a wonderfully strong and long grasp. "Good-by, John," he said, looking up into the other's face.

"Good-by, Aleck," said Marsy, in a low, firm voice, but with a face as pale as death.

There was not a tear in the eye of either of them. At length, Graham let go his friend's hand, but still kept his eyes on his face. It was hard for him to say the last good-by. He put up both arms, and, as Marsy leaned forward, placed them over his shoulders and drew him down close to himself. At this final moment of intelligence, this last use of his strength, the long-pent-up affection triumphed. He wound one arm about his old friend's neck and kissed him. "Good-by,

John," he said again; and then his head turned on the pillow and his eyes closed, as if he were exhausted by his efforts.

It was his last rational speech. He seemed to sleep awhile, and afterwards he muttered and gesticulated, and finally spoke articulately, in a delirium. At one minute he was back in his army life, and at another at home with his sister. Marsy sat on one side of the bed beside him and Frances on the other, trying to keep him as undisturbed as possible.

There was an episode in his army life with which Marsy was familiar. He was in charge of a section of a flying battery and had been sent to shell some woods. It proved to be the beginning of a serious engagement, and before long the enemy's troops came swarming out of the wood and round the little crest where the battery was. The order came to him to retire. The advancing infantry were so close that the paces they were distant could be counted. All the guns but one were limbered and starting. Graham saw that there happened to be but one round of ammunition left for that piece. The bullets were pouring in. "Fire that round, as it 's the last one," he said to the men. The gun was loaded and discharged, the flame of it going right into the faces of the first men up. With a whirl and a rattle the carriage was off, — the commanding officer (this same Graham) lending a hand to the last man to mount the carriage as they galloped. "It was a risky thing," he said; "but it was only one round

and I did n't want to carry it back." At any rate, the gun was not lost.

This fight, now past midnight, he seemed to be going through over again. He was too weak to gesticulate any more. Marsy and Frances each held a hand. "Now! fire!" he shouted hoarsely, but his voice fell hardly audible. "Now, off with you! jump on the piece, there! jump! jump, I say! Here, give me your hand!" and he squeezed Marsy's hand, that once, with a pressure as strong as if he were in a spasm. "Ha, ha!" he laughed, "that is good; now we 're off; they thought the gun was theirs! No! oh, no! ha, ha!" Then he became calm. In a few minutes, seeming to know the difference between the man's and the woman's hand that held his, he pressed Frances' hand gently, and said, scarcely above a whisper, "Yes, Nellie, I have a leave of absence now; I will be home soon. — Soon," he repeated; and again, "Soon, Nellie."

Those were his last words.

CHAPTER XX.

ON THE ROCKS.

THE day was just dawning, when the final stillness having settled upon the death-chamber in the Marsy mansion, and the number of souls there having been but just reduced from three to two, the windows and shutters were thrown open and the morning air came in. It was a gusty November morning, — the beginning of a northeast storm. The two watchers had heard it strike upon the house just before Graham died. It came with a sudden blast that shook the windows, and set the big chimney rumbling. It was as if some spirit-king, the king of all that rushes and dashes and stays not and is strong, had dashed up to the old homestead furiously, in his windy chariot, and leaping out, with keen, glittering eye and flowing beard, had demanded this subject of his who lay upon his bed within, and had whirled him away to one of the seats that are reserved, in the sovereign's distant palace, for the strong. The gusts that went howling by seemed like a retinue, sweeping on after his Majesty on this stately journey to install the new member of his household in his place. At all events, the storm-wind had

come; and after it smote the house, the spirit of Alexander Graham was no longer there.

Now, in the dawn, the sky was overcast and threatening. The wind caught up the scattered leaves in the yard and fanned them into windrows; and then a fresh gust would come along and whirl the whole pile aloft, scattering its members abroad again over the grass. One could almost imagine that the careering leaves were the dust that the feet of the coursers, bearing the royal suite, had spurned from them as they flew.

The table was spread in the breakfast-room below; and Sister Frances, composed in her demeanor, sat down to it opposite her host. She only took her cup of coffee, however, and then arose and went to the window. Marsy arose, too, and accompanied her. "I have ordered the carriage for you," he said.

"I would rather walk," she replied. "Please countermand it; I should prefer the exercise."

"I will escort you, if you will permit me," he said; "it is rather early yet."

She made no response. The watching and the mental tension of the night had fatigued her. She was not in a mood to resist, or do anything but acquiesce. A sort of numbness seemed to possess her, and she was but half open to impressions. She remained standing where she was, for a minute or two, and then, as if suddenly collecting herself, and responding to his proposal, she said, "Yes, if you please," and went into the hall and out of the door with him.

They went, side by side, down the walk and across the road, and along the path through the fields. She walked on rapidly, taking the lead. Neither of them spoke. When they reached the hedge and the wooden fence just outside it, bounding the convent yard, and her hand was on the little gate, she turned round and confronted him, as if she had just become aware of his presence. Undoubtedly there was some deep look of sorrow on his face, a sorrow which he had not expressed by word or tear. She extended her hand to him; and then her own feelings gave way, and bowing her head on the rail of the gate, she wept unrestrainedly.

At length she looked up. There was no shame in her face for her weakness; she only regarded him with the look that craved some friendship, some companionship. There was no reason why she should not have bidden him good-by; but she waited. "I don't want to go away," she said; "it seems like going away into another world."

Yes, another world. The green spot had faded, and everything was as brown and bare as before. To go in and close the gate behind her, and set her face toward the old stone building within, was like an enforced strangulation of much of her inward life. There seemed to be a double death this morning. A real one behind her, — a living mortification before her.

He did not reply. Words were on his lips, but they were not uttered. He only held out his hand to her,

and she took it again; and the long warm grasp that followed was their parting.

When all the appurtenances of death had become a thing of the past in the Marsy homestead, and that dwelling had become again as cold to her as all homes are to a Sister, — who is equally welcome and unbelonging to them all, — there was a great vacancy in Sister Frances' routine life. Aside from the vague spiritual want, there came daily the hour when she had been used to make her visit to Graham; an hour, now, without its occupation. The mere omission of that visit, the daily disturbance of habit, fixed her mind every day, with something like a shock, upon the more congenial existence that had ended forever. From the side of Graham's grave, as it were, there came to her a voice from the surviving member of that household; a constant calling; a cry that seemed incessant, — always the same voice, always importunate. She combated it, as she did before, by her force of will; but all the time the appeal seemed to grow more urgent, to draw more and more her attention.

She did not see Marsy often. He visited her two or three times, — once to give her some memento of Aleck, and at another time to ask her advice about disposing of some of his friend's personal effects. But, aside from that, she had not seen him.

She was practically inaccessible to him, shut up in that convent. Yet this very immurement made her attractive. The very contradiction between the chance

pert look on her face and the dark Sister's attire was a kind of charm that made him smile more than once, as his fancy brought it back to him. And yet the seriousness of life, as she felt it, was well expressed by that black dress and by residence within that forbidding convent wall; but what mattered it, as long as the heyday of dash and impetuosity was in her mind still? It was a pleasing combination. Alas! it was a conflict too. But a conflict bears its responsibilities; and if we are to mingle in it, what shall our part be? At that, we pause and think.

As time went on, Marsy had a chance to take a reckoning, and consider what he should do. The work that he had cut out for himself with his old friend was finished. The legal work that he had laid aside to take up this friendly and congenial task, was still at hand, if he chose to resume it. But law practice seemed like a mean existence, compared with what he had more lately been engaged in, — to carry with it a dryness of soul-life that he turned away from with distaste. Instead of regarding the deviation already made as a mere temporary departure from his profession, he was prone now to regard it as a final abandonment. The law seemed to him to have been a school rather than an ultimate occupation. He felt the want of a more trenchant and more spiritually exhaustive life than the scope of a conservative and somewhat technical profession could give him. Just what such a life would consist in doing, he could not figure to himself. But to

return to law-practice seemed like a re-entry into bondage.

Yet to embark companionless upon this expansive sea was a lonesome thing to do. How rare it is that any one in this life falls in with a companion who exactly touches that recondite vein of gold, deep within, narrow and subterranean, running as the slenderest filament under the acres and acres of superficial life and ordinary relations of one! So nice is the tread of our companion's foot upon that buried seam of Heaven, it is like a fairy touch, the touch of a fairy's most delicately pointed slipper. Dear, welcome fairy! to discover to me that I have such a streak of strength in me, after all! Come; I do not want to do without you. Stay with me, touching this golden thread of mine, — which is sensitive withal, I assure you, and communicates to me every grateful shock of your foot-fall. Accompany me; else I might lose the course of this redeeming vein and never come by my gold again. Whence came you? Who ordained that at just such a moment in my life, at just such a spot, you should appear, a radiant, lightful figure, to me; and who directed you to touch that hidden vein in me? How did you know it was there? Ah! you did it unwittingly, did you? No credit to you, but you could not help walking there? Well, blundering being, I don't know that it matters how you came to stumble upon it. But I wish you would keep stepping on it; and, in fact, I think it would be an excellent thing if you would keep

on beside me, — if I could see your face, your red lips, your unabashed eyes, the gold-brown sprigs of your hair, and hear your voice; ay, and feel the touch of your hand, — and what if that of the lips too? — as well as the touch of your delicately pointed slipper? Desert me not, companion, redeeming friend, you from the unknown region! Let our ways be one.

The day is of no consequence. It might have been any other day. But it chanced that Marsy, from a little window in one of the gables of the old house, — the window of a garret, where he was sorting out and putting away some old papers, — saw a figure in black, whose gait he recognized, going along through the little meadow that intervened between the convent yard and the Sound, down toward the shore. He watched the figure until it reached the limit of the meadow. It stood at the edge a few minutes, looking out on the water. Then it advanced out on the heap of rocks, and clambering down until it was half out of sight, appeared to seat itself. Only the black hood was visible; but presently that came off. Marsy hesitated a few moments, and then left the garret, and taking his hat strolled down to that same heap of rocks. It was a clear afternoon, but the sun was no longer high. Still, Sister Frances had chosen for her seat a spot that was shaded by the higher rocks behind. He was about to go down to the beach and so come to his destination. But he bethought himself and kept to the grass, where his step could not be heard. He was almost at her hand before

she saw him. He was somewhat agitated, and said, before she could speak, "I came, because I saw you here."

"You are frank, at least," she returned; "I am sorry I can't say as well that you are polite. It is rude to intrude."

"How should I know," rejoined he, with some pleasantry of manner, and an affected fencing which she was in the habit of putting him to, "that you wished to be alone?"

She looked at him a moment, as if in contempt at his trifling. "My dress is enough to show you that. Sisters of Charity do not usually seat themselves in sequestered corners of rocks to have a man come and sit by them."

"I am not sitting by you," he suggested. He was still standing at the edge of the meadow.

"You had better, then," she muttered, with a slight toss of her head, suddenly changing her tack, as she was very apt to do, "or else go away. It is not an easy nor an elegant thing to carry on a conversation with one who is behind one's back."

"I beg your pardon," said he quickly, with a shade of sincerity in his tone; "it was inconsiderate in me to make you keep your head turned and shading your eyes with your hand; if you had had your bonnet on —"

"You did not 'make' me do anything," she interrupted, with a flirt of her head. She watched him in the act of seating himself, and at length burst out into

a decidedly sincere laugh, as all his efforts only procured him a sharp edge of the rock for a seat, with his knees cramped. "I don't think you show much intelligence," she said.

He got up quickly, in assumed embarrassment, and finding a comfortable ledge lower down, settled himself there.

The Sound lay stretched out before them in its late summer afternoon blue. The southwesterly breeze of the earlier part of the day was dying out, and hardly more than a ripple seemed to stir the water. In the lee of the islets of rocks the surface was quite smooth. The usual schooners' sails were far out in the main channel. Overhead a few fleecy clouds sailed, with an almost imperceptible motion, to the eastward. On the shore the diminished swell lapped lazily. There was solitude about the couple. The nearest invasion of it was a half-demolished house of sticks and sand at their feet, and a few periwinkles arranged in a row, which some children had left. It was a delightful, peace-giving scene. Marsy's thoughts strayed away into the past. He had been here occasionally of an afternoon with Graham. Quickly, but in much detail, and with the aroma of its atmosphere still fresh, the last year passed through his mind. For a few moments he did not speak. When the silence was becoming long and he did start to speak, he found it difficult to begin. Finally he said, referring to her recent remark, "Does any one ever 'make' you do anything?"

"No," she answered.

"Do you always do what you wish to, then?"

She turned her face toward him and said, "What right entitles you to this cross-examination?"

She seemed to be a trifle agitated as she said it. In fact, she was lingering here, with this man beside her, longer than she thought she ought to. She was nervous under the influence of that thought, and yet she was not prepared to get up and leave Mr. Marsy. In this situation she was decidedly uncomfortable, and her question was put as much to pass this uncomfortable moment as to answer his impertinent inquiry.

Answering her, he said, "No right recognized by man."

"Nor any recognized by woman," she promptly added.

"It is immaterial," he returned, slightly catching his breath, in his subdued excitement. "But, as I told you, I came here because I saw you here."

"A very poor reason," she said again, quickly.

"I don't think it is," he rejoined. He noticed that her breast was heaving. "I don't know of any more worthy spot to go to."

She was silent.

"None more worthy," he repeated; "none so worthy — for me."

She turned her face toward him with an expression in her eyes that seemed to implore him to stop. But no word escaped her lips. She held her bonnet before

her carelessly by its black strings, and the touch of the light breeze just waved a little her unruly front locks.

"Do you respect me, then?" she said, at length, shyly.

"Thoroughly," he answered.

"I have not acted as a Sister ought to act," she replied, after a moment.

"You have acted as a true woman ought to act," he returned emphatically. "I don't know," he went on warmly, "how a Sister ought to act; I don't care. I know you have acted so as to command my most thorough respect, my most thorough regard—"

"Stop!" she called out suddenly, in a commanding tone, and rising. But her form trembled as she did so, and she did not move away.

Marsy's breath came and went quickly, with his excitement, as he arose with her. "I will say it," he said firmly and hurriedly. "You have from me all that a man can give any woman: not a boy's love, not less passionate than that; but—" He hesitated. "You know the past year, you know what has happened. Take all that is holy and true in that; just as serious and just as deep is my feeling toward you. You talk about its being wrong," he continued, as she stood there quivering and her head cast down. "Wrong! What is right, then? What is there good, under this sky, if it is not this?"

He stood before her, almost fierce in his bearing. She looked up at him, with a most piteous expression.

He noticed that she was standing with difficulty, and took her by the hand, and helped her to sit down again. Again she looked at him, with all her barriers broken down, — an ingenuous look of frank confession; if she had laid her head on his breast, it could not have been more loving. Her color had forsaken her cheeks. She did not speak, nor he. His eyes were off on the water, and hers on the knot she was tying and untying, and tying again, in her bonnet strings.

When she finally spoke, she said, with apparent calmness: "You have come to a serious matter. It is a serious thing when a woman renounces the world. It is a serious thing even to consider her re-entering it. She renounces it from a motive, — a deep motive, — a motive that should last, if the woman has any dignity of character, for — her lifetime." After a few minutes, during which he did not speak, she went on: "Would a friend wish to cheapen the life of such a woman, and dissipate it in irresolution? Would a friend wish to prove her an unstable and fitful creature?"

"Let me ask you, in return," he rejoined, in a less temperate tone than hers, "is a woman more admirable in adhering to a resolve than in yielding to her love? Is she at her best as an artificial or a human being?"

"Is a woman to violate her vow?" she asked, in return.

"Who is wronged by that violation?" was his answer.

"He to whom it was given," she returned.

"That is fanciful."

"It is religious."

"And who is wronged if she fail to violate it? Is no one injured then? And if a human being is injured, is that religion? Is that the will of God? Is it true religion?"

"No one is injured," she answered quickly and proudly; thinking, in her sensitiveness, that he was referring to herself.

"You are the best judge of that," he replied, following her thought.

"No one is injured," she asserted again.

"No one?" he answered now, with a slightly satirical smile, gazing keenly into her eyes.

She saw his meaning for the first time, and blushed. She had laid herself open to the charge of selfishness. But she quickly recovered herself and said, "No; no one, if he is a man."

"I am a man," he rejoined with some bitterness; "and I rejoice that I am one who can be injured by a woman, — by such a woman as you," he added more softly.

Again the tender look came into her face, and again her breast heaved. He had turned away, with his back to her. At length he confronted her again, and said solemnly, "It is hard to think of the prospect without you."

Her face was cast down. "It will not be so hard to

live the future as to think it all at once," she said, in a low, comforting tone.

"No; that is what a woman says," he returned savagely, "that is what a woman may always say. I had thought there must be a woman with a true heart; when I found you, I thought I had found one; but you are like the rest, — false and ashy to the core. A man alone may have a heart; a woman is a thing of selfishness and fear."

"I have no fear!" she cried in anger, all thought of right or wrong gone; "you it is who are afraid, — a man, helpless and dependent on a woman. I have no respect for such a man."

It was a quick speech, and spoken in a tone of disgust; but Marsy's only thought was, that she was acting unworthily of herself. He waited a few moments. Then he said: "You are dealing hastily with great things. I am sorry you do not respect me. I cannot change myself. I confess that you have warmed my heart, and restored the life that was dying in me. If that is weakness, I cannot help it. I am grateful to you for it, for what you have done; at least, I should have been. It is undone now. I am alone again, — a man — who is not afraid; who will live — as he can; without you, who will live for what you love best."

"For what I love best?" she asked dreamily, her eyes looking into the distance; "for what I love best?" she repeated piteously, as her lips quivered and the tears came into her eyes; "for what — I love — best,"

she said the third time, her head drooping on her breast as she stood, and her arms hanging listlessly at her side.

He stood motionless a few moments, scarcely comprehending her meaning. Then, as he understood her, he advanced to her side and took her relaxed hand in his. It lay there as if it had no life.

"For what you love best?" he whispered.

She did not answer at first. "Yes; and what I must leave." She looked into his face in a dazed sort of way, as if she scarcely knew where she were. She left her hand in his; she turned half round, and he led her by it, supporting her as she went to the green bank above.

As she felt the grass under her feet, her step seemed to become more steady, and she appeared to gain some control over herself. She stood a moment facing the sun, and brushed back the stray locks of hair from her forehead.

"Don't come with me," she said in a low voice to him; and then, in a still lower voice, scarcely audible, "Good-by." Her hand was extended to him, and he took it, but it was relaxed as before.

"Good-by," he returned, in a muffled tone; and at length, and only at length, relinquished her hand and went away with bowed head, down the rocks, past the children's periwinkles and half-built sand-houses, to the beach.

CHAPTER XXI.

MARSY STRAIGHTENS OUT HIS PAPERS.

MARSY — a few days after that critical day when he had been bold enough to ask for the hand of a Sister of Charity, and was honored, not with her hand, but with a conflict of her heart — came to the determination to leave the scene of these occurrences altogether; to go, in fact, to Europe. What he should do after his arrival there, he did not decide.

There were various matters now to be attended to. First of all, there was a long talk with Joslyn, of the innumerable particulars of the farm. Then there was Mrs. Hatfield the housekeeper. She was dreadful afraid to stay in the house alone; wages was no great object; peace and security from attack were everything. Was Samuels going to remain, occupying his quarters in the stable? Well, yes, he was, and keep the place in order. And Tom, the stable lad? He was going. And, well, "dear me, Mr. Marsy, I am so timid, as Mr. Hatfield used to say, always a-starting every time the clock struck, and my needle a-flying out of my hand. It is a kind of nervousness, sir; for, Heaven knows, I have n't no reason to fear no one, as never lifted my little finger to hurt a hair of any one's head; and I can't

believe that Providence ever lets such people suffer from violence; but it's a pity they always expect it. We are all very ignorant of what is in store for us, sir, and it might be the very next thunder-storm would strike me dead; and think of such a thing as my lying stiff and stark on the floor of this house, with a black streak on my face and my shoes burst off, for a whole day, and longer, if Samuels did n't happen to remember me and come in to see if I was alive. Excuse my talking so much, sir, but I only wanted to explain my feelings, and to have you understand that it was n't the place I objected to, which I like, but only the lonesomeness; and that I really believe I should die of fright before a month was out, if I was to undertake it;" and all Mrs. Hatfield's little gray curls went bobbing, as her head became shaky under this long speech. So Joslyn had to be seen again; and it was arranged that he and his family were to vacate the farm-house proper and come and occupy the kitchen wing of the house, thus, in a measure, keeping Mrs. Hatfield company. Then Samuels himself had to be consulted as to the disposition to be made of the stock. But at last it was all done, and Marsy came in and sat down to his solitary supper.

After supper, he went into the library and overhauled all the papers in his desk, — the accumulation of his three years of sojourn here. It was late in the evening before he disposed of them all. In one of the drawers he came across what had once been a handful of fresh wild-roses with long stems. The dried petals

had fallen from the stalks. Apparently they had lain a long time in the drawer, forgotten. The sight of them made him stop in his work and muse. At last he remembered. Barely a year ago it was, when Mrs. Hiller had brought them in, on one of her first visits to Graham. He had laid them away, when they were withered, to keep for his old friend; and other things had happened, and they had been forgotten; and here they were. How freshly they brought to his mind the little circle as it was a year ago! How cheerful the house was then, not with merriment, but warm and cheerful with the love that was in it! Now it was barren; what had made voice and movement within its walls had been taken out; now there was only space. He got up from his chair, and took a turn or two up and down the room. It was disturbing, to think over these things. As he walked, he suddenly stopped before a leathern easy-chair that was at a corner of the fireplace. "Here it was," he thought, "that he used to sit." He regarded the chair a few moments, as if he could still see Graham sitting there. Then he checked himself, and went on with his walk. At length he halted again, and bent over the stalks and browned petals that he had just picked up and laid in a heap on the desk. They lay like a ruin, disorganized and lifeless. To his fancy, as he remembered what hands had brought them here, and for whose hands they were intended, the little scattered heap seemed to be a symbol of the disintegration of their little household. He bent

down and sniffed the slight odor that still remained to the pile. The faint scent brought back now to his mind, distinctly, the particulars of the afternoon when these flowers were brought. He could remember just the way the shadows of the trees lay on the lawn as he opened the door for her; just the slight flutter of her straight black garb, as a whisk of the fresh west breeze caught its fold; just the expression on her face, — a look of diffidence mingled with one of expectation, and of the pleasure of eagerness. It was foolish to indulge in these recollections. He picked up the pile of stalks and leaves carefully, for Aleck's sake, and the sake of the memory of that time of triple friendship, and put them away in a box.

Everything about the desk was cleaned up; but Marsy left it open. He did not use it, however, but took a long pipe from a shelf, and filling and lighting it, sat down before the hearth. The match that he had thrown down there ignited a chance bit of paper swept under the kindlings. He did not put it out, but let it burn. The kindlings caught, and a little fire blazed up on the andirons. It was a summer night, and the windows were open, and the slats of the shutters. The air that came in, however, was cool and damp. The fire was not disagreeable. He picked a few small sticks of hard wood from the basket, and put them on the blaze. "It is rather more comfortable," he said to himself, "to leave the old house with the fireplace warm."

He sat before the flame and finished his pipe, and

filled and finished another, and still another. It was a moment for long reflection. Here his way was turning, as it had turned three years before, when he came to the homestead with Graham. Perhaps that was a more important turning than this, — a breaking off then from his profession, from the strictly ordinary course of social existence. This was only a swerving, not an abrupt turn, of the road. But it was enough of a change to set him thinking, enough to draw his mind back to the progress of his life.

Around this old place, thirty years ago, he had tumbled in his small boy's life, when hens'-nests and shingle water-wheels were his occupation. Then came the years at the village school. In the midst of them there was the scene where he was the chief mourner at his father's funeral. He remembered distinctly the curious look on one or two of the village faces on the road to the grave. He went through his college days, with their fair share of sports and levity; then his two or three years of army life; then the life in New York. He traced the gradual growth of cynicism that seemed to have grown over his heart by imperceptible degrees; and then his turning to Aleck, with the cynicism still active; and then the combination of that old friend's solemn, growing weakness and death with the fresh and impulsive, but steadfast and sincere devotion to the deceased friend, of that Sister from the neighboring convent, whose face was such a mixture of sorrow and life, — a combination that had dissolved the cynicism

and restored him to his boyish impressionability and to his early relation with the world. "Let it stay," he murmured, as he sat looking into the fire; "it is nature and truth, and gives a healthy, if a vulnerable life, — one that is hurt already. A man can give and take when he lives according to his nature, even if he has had a splash of the disagreeable." A smile even lit up his face, — a faint and quiet smile of triumph over the evil, the disappointment, of the world; a smile of the lofty tranquillity of the soul, which, in its contemplation of the illimitable, is beyond the reach of hurt, beyond the line where defeat can come to it.

Cheerfulness seemed to take possession of him. He chirruped to the terrier that was lying on the floor beside him, trying to sleep, as it appeared, but raising his head every now and then, with an uneasy eye on his master, — the same dog that could not understand why Graham stayed in bed, — and held his hand down to him. The dog put his fore paws on his master's outstretched leg, and wagged his stump of a tail. "It will be all right, old chap," — as if the little beast were a human friend, — "we will come on;" and he slapped the dog, in play, on the jowls, until the little fellow snapped at the hands with savage growling, and finally wound up with a leap into his master's lap and an attempt to lick his face. Doubtless he could not understand the sense of triumph that had come to his human companion, and insisted on pitying him as he had pitied him before when he was solemn in his contemplation.

The frolic ended, Marsy laid down his pipe and seated himself at his desk again. He took his pen and briskly wrote this letter to his friend and former law-partner, Edward Chalmers: —

MY DEAR NED, — I am going to break up here; that is, — as there is no family here to break up, — I am going away for a while. I don't know how long I shall be absent; I set no limits. I have engaged passage on a steamer, and shall go to Liverpool; thence, to the Continent, without waiting long in England, I think. I have a notion of settling down for a time in some European capital and doing some studying. But my plans are uncertain. It depends on whom I may chance to meet, on what turns up. Only, I don't believe I shall be here again, — I mean in the United States, — for two or three years.

It was very kind of you, as I have before told you more than once, to say, when Aleck died, that my old place with you was ready for me; and I thank you for giving me my own time to think it over. There are some reasons why I should wish to take your suggestion, — I mean, aside from the pleasure it would give me to be with you. It may be a good thing for a man to have a steady occupation; something thoroughly objective, and that demands certain hours and regularity of labor; something that is not self-imposed, but that imposes itself on you, by virtue of your being in the swift current of human affairs, — the necessity of attending daily to work that you have undertaken. Such a thing is almost needful to keep one in an inwardly healthy condition. At least, I have such a notion; and yet the doubt sometimes occurs to me, whether this addiction to systematic drudgery, to something you don't like, is good. I am tempted to try the other, and see whether the self-

imposed and supposedly congenial work is constructive or destructive in its tendency.

My affairs, such as they are, are in a tolerably snug condition. The farm here will pay its way at least. The buildings are in good repair. The property is unencumbered. My belongings, otherwise, are interest-bearing securities of various sorts, which will yield me, as they are, about $3,500 a year, — not a rich man, you see; but I don't know that I care about that, except not to be foolish with what I have. The old homestead and its acres I am a good deal attached to; and if worst came to worst, I could always get my living off them by digging the soil. But that is neither here nor there just now. Only I wish you would keep an eye on the place. I have told Joslyn that you might be up here, and that if you are he can talk to you; but there is no need of your coming up more than once a year or so; and if you would write me a line then to the enclosed address, I shall get it. In case there should be need for spending money about the place, I will arrange for your drafts on the Washington Bank to be honored on my account.

I shan't have time to stop and see you. The vessel sails to-morrow afternoon, and I can only just board her. In fact, I doubt if you will get this before she starts. (She is the "Galicia.") I really have had no time to spare since I took my resolve to go; and I am always yours,

Affectionately, JOHN MARSY.

The next morning he rose early enough to pay a call at the Bradburys' and the Salisburys', to bid the friends there good-by; and then he was gone.

CHAPTER XXII.

A CONVENT YARD.

A YEAR and more rolled by over Marshton; during which period its inhabitants lived their usual unexciting lives. Bits of stray gossip flew about, of course; but then that was the normal condition of Marshton, as of all human society, and was as natural as the flying about of the birds. With the exception of the gossip, it was a quiet year. The convent, too, went on as usual, to all appearances. Sister Ambrosia was just as good and competent as ever; Sister Agnes was just as angelic as ever, and Sister Cecilia just as militant. The cedars still stood, and the arabesque gates still swung on their rusty hinges at the entrance of the avenue. The lichens clung to the old building; and it breathed out, in spite of itself, its old-fashioned hospitality. But with Sister Frances everything did not go smoothly.

She heard that Mr. Marsy had gone away. That was fit, — that he should go. She breathed more freely when she heard it; yet it was sad to think that she had driven him away. She remembered him in her prayers at first, but she soon found that that would

not do; so he was not prayed for. He was utterly gone then; and with however ill a grace, Sister Frances set about to confine herself to her convent life. It was hard to be so stony as not to pray for him; but it had to be done.

Pretty soon there came a package of books for her from New York, of her own ordering. They were devotional writings of the Roman Catholic Church. The Protestant Episcopal books were not strong enough for her case. She began to read them, and strove to build up in herself a religious enthusiasm; to make the Sacred Heart, as Sisters had done before her, the object of her love. But it proved to be a wholly misconceived scheme. Pity was included in it; and to be tender-hearted, to be softened, at this particular time, was something she could not endure. With a sigh at last, she laid down her books, convinced that her only refuge was to become callous, — to live, not a pitying, tender life, but a hard one; to live, not by sentiment, but by iron resolve. So she crucified all her affection, and became of iron.

Her deeds to the poor were not less kind; but her sympathy did not go with them, — at least as far as she was aware. She was determined to have no sympathy, — to assist the poor only as the earth assisted them with its products, in the natural course of things, without heart. She became cynical and scoffing; though she did not scoff outwardly. Human life was become but one grand piece of irony. She once used to like to

assist old Henry, the convent gardener, over his flowers. But now — beware! sweet scents are a snare.

The change even showed itself in her face. It grew hard. The deep look went out of her eyes, and a penetrating one took its place.

But, bless me! it was all an artificial life. She could stand it for a while. But it was an exhausting struggle, — to go about, always choking the life out of one's soul, — on guard over it, every minute of the day. At times she felt what grim determination it took. But she never loosened her grip; only became tired, physically tired. Yet she was too proud to show that to the Sisters. She thought she did not show it; but at times, when, in spite of herself, she dreamed, then the roses in her cheeks would droop and a hopeless and sad expression came out, which the Sisters noticed and talked about.

Luther's vigilant eye caught these changes; and brooding over it, he finally interrogated her, and startled her by asking if she were not happy. The kindness of his manner, striking upon her in her present mood, almost brought a sudden gush of tears. But she recovered herself, and choking down the bursting sob, replied, with a gay laugh, that she was as happy as a bird. He said no more; and she, when she entered her chamber, examined her face closely in the glass, to trace the tell-tale lines. Thereafter she comported herself with a livelier air; but it was a poor piece of acting. Every one saw through it.

In her sense of the vanity of all things, even the schooling of the oystermen's children became a darksome business. Her inability to keep these little souls from sorrow, as they should go on in life, made it seem as if the task of teaching them were useless. She sometimes thought she traced out incoming lines of an early sadness in their young faces; and after they were dismissed, the small empty chairs seemed to have a sorrowful fate hovering above them, awaiting only the return of the children the next day to perch upon them as its devoted objects, becoming more and more a part of them as they grew toward manhood and womanhood. Each day brought some pleasing ebullition of a childish heart; but that only made the childish innocence seem the more pitiful.

In the winter a mild form of scarlet fever ran through the oystermen's village, and the school was closed, and visiting and nursing took the place of teaching. Then, with her energies fully employed, she had a season of inward peace. But when the summer came and the disease disappeared, she fell again into her sombreness of existence.

One day in spring, just after the leaves had come out, she was strolling about the convent yard alone. The place was still, but for the faint sound of the gardener's spade as he dug his beds. She could see his bent form as he worked patiently; his earthy toil was enviable. At her hand was the stone fence; and inside it, the same old bushes that were there when she entered

the convent, with the same dusky spaces and bare ground behind them, — recesses inviolate to all life but that of the zigzagging gnats and the chance fowls that came there to devour them; the dead twigs lying on the ground seemed as if they might be the same dismembered specimens that lay there the year before, so unchanging was the spot. She turned away and sauntered across the grass. There was solemnity on every hand, — in the graceful droop of every blade of grass; in the maple leaves, pendent and still; in the boles of the upright trees; in the silence of the earth beneath her step; in the gray, erect convent walls. She turned her face away from the whole place, and looked over to the neighboring orchard that was just past its bloom. The leaves were just as still over there, but they looked brighter. It was another world. Those acres did not belong to the convent.

Unheedful of the passing minutes, she stood there a long time. So far away were her thoughts, that she did not hear the soft tread of Sister Agnes, as she approached. The rustle of her garments close by her side startled her. Agnes drew her arm around her waist. "Sister Frances," she said, "you must not be so still."

"I am not still," said Frances, smiling at the gentle reproof, and thinking of the cheerfulness she had assumed of late.

"No, dear; you are not. But you were. Now, all of a sudden, you are full of life. You are very changeable."

Sister Agnes leaned her head slightly forward as she spoke, and looked into her companion's face. Frances had reached that point in the weariness of her efforts, where she was rather pleased than otherwise to have some person like Sister Agnes, from whom no one could take offence, take her to task. With a blush and a laugh, she asked, "What do you mean, Agnes?"

They were a pretty pair, walking there together, in that staid place and in those dull garments, with so much light in their faces. One might almost have imagined them shut off from the rest of the world, not for charity and religion's sake, but by reason of their beauty, — the inmates of some heavenly sort of seraglio.

"What do you mean?" repeated Frances, giving her friend a sort of jogging hug, as if to bring her back to her subject.

"I don't believe you are happy, Frances," said the other, with a look of pity in her eyes, as she gazed again into Frances' face.

"Who is?" responded Frances.

"We ought to be," said Agnes.

The Sister was silent.

"We have Christ's work to do here," continued her companion; "and nothing can be higher than that, and nothing more satisfying. To do the highest ought to be complete, for this world; and for the next, there is the sure hope of heaven through our dear Saviour. Frances, dear, is it not all perfect? — such a life and

such a future?" A beatific glow overspread the gentle Sister's face, as she seemed to see before her some vision of heaven.

"Your life is so peaceful," returned Frances, with regret in her tone.

"And why should not yours be, dear? Have we not the same ends in view?"

"I have the end to bless the world by my life. But —"

"But what, Sister Frances?"

"If my life is not really lived; if there is deed without motive; if what is really myself is not lived!"

"Then what, dear?"

Frances collected herself and said rather lightly, "Oh! one is a little distracted by the thought of that."

Agnes was silent; and after a while Frances asked her, "Would you be satisfied if you felt you were living that way?"

"I don't know; I have only the feeling of being fully employed here." Agnes was rather doubtful whether she fully understood her companion's case; but she wished to administer comfort. "Heaven will cure all your sorrows and difficulties, Sister," she added in a low voice.

Frances turned upon her with a look of decision in her face. "That will come too late, too late for this life. What shall we do here? Ought not the face and demeanor of one to change, once in a while, who does not know that yet?"

"Get Heaven to help you," answered Agnes.

"How can Heaven help me?" asked Frances. "No, no, I can do my will myself; but what shall my will be?"

"The will of your Father in heaven; to do what is right."

"Very true," was the response; "but can Heaven tell me what is right?"

"Oh, Frances, your conscience should."

"Conscience is a whiffling thing," returned Frances, boldly. "My resolve is the only thing that I can find in me that is at all steadfast. I can do what I wish to resolve to do."

"Sister!" exclaimed Agnes, mystified and moved to pity, too, by the depth of her tone.

"Yes; and what shall I resolve to do?" said Frances, smiling; "that is the question."

Meantime the gossips of Marshton had found a sweet thing, a veritable gossips' lump of sugar, to settle down upon; walking over it and mouthing it, like so many flies, in a sort of eager quest; finding its limits and walking back again, and moving to and fro over it, in endless, uneasy motion.

Miss Jane Gibbs, the dressmaker, had turned up at Mrs. Salisbury's with great things in her mind. Miss Gibbs had a cousin in New York, who went out to nurse by the month, and who was a very good nurse, as everybody said. It so happened that this good nurse entered, in the course of her occupation, a household

where abode a certain female relative of the lady who was to be nursed. This female relative, as soon as she knew that the nurse had a cousin in Marshton, suddenly had a piece of news recalled to her mind. This piece of news was from the lips of a friend of hers, a maiden lady, who was a distant cousin of John Marsy.

It seems that "John's" relatives had rather resented his intimate association with Alexander Graham; and on that account, and not because they wished him to stay in the law, they had warmly criticised among themselves his action in leaving his profession. The whole matter of taking Graham to Marshton had a bad odor to them; and when they heard, as they could not help hearing, that a certain very pretty Sister Frances had paid frequent visits at the bachelors' hall, — of course under the pretence of Christian ministration to the invalid, — it seemed to them that their cousin and his friend and the Sister were all mixed up together in some deprecable performance. As near as they could make out, it was a case of love between John and the Sister; and as he could not go to see her at the convent, she, brazen and recreant thing! had gone to see him at his own house. No charges were made. There were the facts. People could think as they chose. But it *was* a pity.

This story it was which had come to Jane's ears from her cousin the nurse in the city; and which she told to Mrs. Salisbury as soon as she could, without appearing to be eager.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mrs. Salisbury; "I never dreamed it!"

That evening she told it all to her husband, and asked him what he thought about it. Edward was silent a few moments. He had his own thoughts about Marsy and Frances, but there was no use in speaking of them now. He was also thinking over Graham's last days, and the light that Mrs. Hiller had brought to them. At last he said: "If she had stayed away, she might not have done so much good; she was like a sister to Graham, like his own sister come back to him, if we may believe what the poor fellow said."

Mrs. Salisbury pursed her lips and looked at her husband. "Mr. Graham is dead," she said; and as she spoke the words, her eyes dropped. When she raised them, the lashes were just wet, — for she was a sympathetic lady; but she pursed her lips again and looked at her husband and said: "But as for her, Edward, she ought to have kept her order and our church above reproach — somehow. That was her duty. Think of this rumor!" Soon she added: "Mr. Marsy is not to blame; of course he had to consider Mr. Graham."

The story did not get out through Mrs. Salisbury. But Jane, in her perambulations, found the burden of it too heavy to carry, and kept dropping it here and there about Marshton, until it was town-talk that Mr. Marsy and Sister Frances were secretly in love. And as the Sister walked to her pew in the village church, from Sunday to Sunday (Mr. Farrington, who officiated

at the convent chapel, being now dead, and no one yet appointed to succeed him), the passing along the aisle of this figure in black, with her reprehensible but interesting attachment, disturbed the devoutness of those parishioners who had heard the gossip. No lisp of all this, however, reached her pretty pink ears.

CHAPTER XXIII.

OYSTERS GO DOWN AND UP.

JOHN MARSY had not been absent a great while from Marshton, before it occurred to Mr. Bayne that the time was favorable for wreaking a little vengeance on him and his friend Bailey; and by reason of this thought there came a convulsion in the oyster business of Marshton.

It was not Mr. Bayne's way to make a bluster in taking his revenge; but rather to spread his toils, like a spider, and quietly await the expected entanglement of his victim in them; and then, when he began to struggle, to bind a coil or two more about him.

Bailey had begun to thrive in the oyster farming at which Marsy had started him; and under ordinary conditions he would soon have made a success of it, and repaid Marsy his cash advances. But it occurred to Bayne that if — Bailey's bank being closed during Marsy's absence — he could create a condition of things that would require fresh capital from Bailey in order to carry on his business, it would be a neat way to balk his two enemies. So he quietly set to work to reduce Bailey's receipts.

All the Marshton oysters were sold to one man, an agent who took them by rail to Goodhope. The price had been unchanged for years. But now Mr. Bayne suddenly dropped his to three quarters of what it had been. Then he went back to his den, and smiled, and awaited events. The agent was a shrewd man of commerce. "I will take advantage of this strife," he thought, "and make all those Marshton fellows sell me at the same price." And he did. The oystermen looked black; but it was the only way of getting their oysters to market, and they had to submit. To open a new channel to Goodhope was something that they could not think out, still less accomplish all at once.

At first a very bitter feeling arose against Bayne. But when they regarded the subject and perceived that he could do as he pleased as long as he pleased, and when they learned, at the same time, that it was only because Bailey was in the oyster business that he was lowering the prices, they turned with one accord upon Bailey,—threatened to smash his boat, pull up his stakes, and destroy his beds. An ugly feeling was abroad. In Bailey's breast, on the other hand, there was rising a great wave of determination to hold his ground. The revivification that Marsy had effected in his life at the moment of his greatest desperation had become a dear thing to him; and he was determined to stand by the enterprise that his friend had planned, and to which he had helped him with money. He said little to his fellow-oystermen, growing surly.

Sister Frances became aware of what was going on by the fresh lack of harmony that now crept into the Bailey household, and showed its effects there. Bailey was ill-humored, and short with Jennie again. She, in turn, grew sulky, and neglected the work. The children huddled together again as they used to, — all of them awed but Jimmy, who skirmished on his one leg and crutch in the very face of the enemy, not only fearlessly but cheerily. When the whole story became known to the Sister one day, from the lips of Bailey himself, she began to ponder the matter. There was a momentary flash of indignation at Bayne. But that was not practical. The only thing to do was to re-establish Bailey.

She soon paid a visit to Uncle Luther. "Uncle," said she, "I want some advice. I am going into business. I am!" she persisted, as he smiled. "Do you know about the difficulty among the oystermen?"

"I have heard something about it," he replied; "I understand that your friend Bailey is at the bottom of it."

"No, he is n't. Mr. Bayne is. He has a grudge against Bailey, and Mr. Marsy too; he is satisfying it on both of them."

"What is his grudge against Marsy?" inquired Luther.

She told him, and he seemed to be rather pleased that Marsy had spited Bayne.

"What are you going to do?" he asked finally.

"I will tell you," she said. "I am going to represent all the oystermen, Bailey included, and I am not going to sell the oysters to that man who has been buying them. I have chartered the 'Lucy,'—at least, Mr. Warburton did it for me,— you know that old sloop down in the marsh; and Captain Georgie is to sail her, and take all the oysters to Goodhope in her; and Mr. Warburton has a friend there, a Mr. Hopkins, an oyster-dealer, and he is going to buy them all at the old price."

"What interest has Warburton in it?" queried her uncle, curiously.

"Me," answered Frances, with a complacent smile. Luther laughed. "I thought somebody would have to take the responsibility," continued she, recurring to her plan, "to induce the oystermen to go into it; so Captain Georgie tallies the baskets as they go on board, and pays cash for them right there."

"With whose money?"

"With mine."

"I supposed so;" and Uncle Luther turned his head and looked out of the window a little while in silence.

"What do you think of it?" finally asked Frances.

"I think you are a good girl," replied the old gentleman, rising. He stepped over to her, and kissed the face that was radiant with this project; he thought he had not seen it look so happy for a long time, as she looked up and smiled contentedly at him.

The scheme for redeeming Bailey's fortune and that

of his fellow-oystermen worked to a charm; and Bailey rose high in their favor now, and they even went so far as to offer him some rude expressions of shame for their momentary hostility. Old Captain Georgie was an old-time sailing-master, who had navigated his schooners up and down the Atlantic seaboard until he had become grizzled in the service, and stiff in the small of his back and his knees. But he was tough yet, and ready for a "quiet lark," as he termed the part he took in this small contention with Mr. Bayne. As he stood at the wheel of his broad-breasted and slumbrous craft, the "Lucy," while, going out with the tide, she crept by the Bayne oyster-fields with her cargo, bound for Goodhope, a glitter would come into his old eye, his jaw with its gray chin-tuft would drop a little, and the ragged, shilling straw hat would bob up and down, as he nodded and smiled a passing defiance of contempt at the enemy's property.

Well might Captain Georgie smile. The shrewd old salt reckoned that Bayne would not hold out long; and he did not. To test his scheme a step further, however, Bayne found out where the "Lucy's" oysters went to, and then stepped in to see Mr. Hopkins; not, indeed, knowing to what extent Hopkins was interested in the matter, but just to see what he could do; and Hopkins was very bland, and had the satisfaction of buying Mr. Bayne's oysters, for a period of two weeks, at two thirds of the price he was paying and continued to pay to the other oystermen of Marshton.

But that was no sort of game for Bayne to be playing at, and he gave it up for the present. Perhaps another day would bring another chance.

But the new course of things was established now; and the "Lucy" went on her daily cruise, indifferent to the fortunes of Mr. Bayne. A slight change was threatened, indeed, at one time. For Luther leaned to the idea of a corporation to do this oyster business, to be called, perhaps, the Marshton Oyster Co.; and he hinted at great extensions of the business. But Frances was emphatic in her opposition. She did not like stocks or corporations, either for the oystermen or herself. There should be none, where there was no need of any. She liked individuality in business. The Captain and she and the oystermen were better off as they were. Nobody should be merged in a corporation and lost sight of, as if he were at the bottom of the ocean, an oyster himself. Her foot was set down against a corporation; and Uncle Luther had to retreat.

During this affair of the oysters, Caleb's dry old heart seemed to acquire some fresh energy and stir; so that something, which had been struggling for some time to get out, at last came to the light. "Mrs. Hiller," he said, one day, with some nervousness, "I want to tell you something. I have seen you before; at least, of course I have; I mean, a great while before, — a great while ago." He had taken off his hat, and was twirling it, and standing with a downcast face. "It was n't here; it was in South America. You were

about two years old; of course you don't remember it. I was a clerk for your father. When he opened the branch house on the river, he took me down to be his agent there. I only knew him in a business way; but I was older than he, and he was very kind and respectful to me, on account of my being older. I was gray then, ma'am, though I was only thirty-five; something had happened and I was glad to get so far away." Caleb stopped a moment and looked at her. "Oh, Mrs. Hiller, I hope you won't get gray as I did; I mean here — in — in Marshton."

It was a bold step for Caleb; for he meant the convent when he said "Marshton," and she knew it. But it was taken; and he was half frightened at having stepped so far into another's life. It was against all his habit. He could say no more about it. "I beg your pardon, ma'am," he continued. "You will pardon me, I am sure, when I tell you how much attached I was to your father; and it made such an impression on me when you came to the river, — I was so surprised, — with your bright hair and eyes, only two years old; I can only think of you as you were then." She turned her head away. "I began with your grandfather," he went on; "when I was very young, — you are the only one left now. My life was queer. I buried myself in business, in work; and I have no attachments, — that is, only, when your father died and the business was closed, I thought I would come up here and settle down near you. I hope you will pardon me, — I haven't told you

my real name; it is n't Warburton; it is Clark, Caleb Clark; I wondered if you had n't heard it."

Frances held her hand out to the faithful old friend.

Poor fellow! with his gray hair, his thin frame, and weazened face! He could tell her everything but the one thing in his life that turned him gray. Perhaps it was not such a serious thing, after all, only he was not strong enough to throw it off; and the little life that was in him had fed on his clerkly connection, and fed, nay, feasted, as well as it could, on the two-year-old face of his employer's child for a score of years. Was it strange that he should have wished to assist her in the oyster difficulty?

But Caleb was not the only one who was brought to the front by this commercial interchange of shot. There were few who did not take sides with one party or the other; going, some by their view of the justice of the case, some according to the prompting of their secret, personal grudges. Ebenezer Green was, as far words went, in the thick of the fight, on the side of the Baileys. Nothing, during his term of office as constable, had more grated on him than his arrest of George Bailey; for to Sister Frances, as the widow of Archie Hiller, he must, during the term of his natural life, — such was Ebenezer's stability of posture, — be and remain a faithful friend. He never forgave Joshua Sanford for his action at that school-visitors' meeting; not though Sanford had since timidly expressed his regret for what he had done on that occasion. "It

don't do no good now to be regrettin'," grumbled Green; "he had ought to kep' his eyes open then." No, Ebenezer must follow Sister Frances' fortunes ever after; and his knowledge that she was the friend of the Bailey family had brought on as severe an inward conflict as the miller had ever known, when he had sat in that corner of the Bailey wood-pile in the character of constable. And when, at the trial, the Sister had appeared in the court-room, Ebenezer could not take his eyes off the interested face, except once in a while at a critical point in the testimony.

The line of opposition on which Green stood, led him to face other enemies than Sanford. His displeasure had fallen on Parks, originally, as being Sanford's clerk, though Parks was innocent of all concern in the Hiller matter; but latterly he had had good reason to loathe him. It was on a fine summer morning that Green had brought out of his stable a gay young gelding for display to Rector Clerkenwell, who was thinking of taking to horseback riding. The rector, arrayed in his usual dapper style, was assuming as much of an off-hand bearing — proper in a horse-trade — as he could; and Ebenezer, purveying to the want of his clergyman, was in a species of state and particularly on his honor. Even Mrs. Green, from the slatted buttery-window, was watching the unusual circumstance of their selling a horse to their minister.

"He stands well, don't he, now?" remarked Ebenezer, glancing from the animal to the rector. "Now

we 'll see his action a little. Get up, Jack!" and chirruping and shaking the halter, he got the colt into a trot and ran beside him down to the gate and back.

Mr. Clerkenwell was not much of a judge of horse-flesh, and he could not go analytically into the points of the animal. He was rather pleased with him, however, as a whole. "Would you mind putting a saddle and bridle on him," he asked, "and let me see how he goes when you are on him?"

"Certain," said Ebenezer. "He 's very stiddy on the road," he said, as he mounted.

The rector watched him put the colt at a brisk trot up and down the road. As it was now noontime, several persons happening to be passing stopped, — from the well-known human interest in all dog-fights and horse-trades. Among them was Parks. Parks' knowledge of horse-flesh was such, and no more, as he had acquired in driving Joshua Sanford's lively animal before the grocery wagon in the early days of his service. "Ain't that a wind-gall on that hind leg?" he queried, as if speaking to himself or anybody.

"Which hind leg?" asked the rector, who did not know exactly how a wind-gall looked.

"The off one," replied Parks.

"Are his legs sound?" asked the rector, stepping out into the road, as Ebenezer drew up before the party; "no wind-gall?"

The horse-dealer looked suspiciously round on the group. "Wind-gall!" he said indignantly; "who

said he had a wind-gall? Why, he ain't old enough to have one;" and Eben's suspicious and prejudiced eye rested on Parks. The rector unconsciously looked at Parks too; and Eben demanded sternly, "Was it *you* as said he had a wind-gall?"

Nothing had been said about the horse's legs when Green and Clerkenwell were talking about him alone; and Green's sensitiveness was deeply touched, at being put in the apparent position of having attempted to deceive his rector by a silence on the point. He was inwardly churning with rage, and would have been minded to get off and cut Parks with his riding-whip, if the rector had n't been there. As it was, he could only take up his defence like an accused person; and while Parks retorted, "I did n't say he had anything," he got off his horse and went in among the animal's legs, rubbing them down, to demonstrate to Mr. Clerkenwell that there was no wind-gall. "You can see for yourself," he said, "that there ain't none. Nobody but a fool would ha' put that idea into any one's head; nobody but the wust kind of a fool. True, it 's nat'ral enough for any one to enquire when anything 's said ag'inst a hoss, but —" Here Green's feelings became too much for him, and he turned round abruptly to Parks and said: "Get out o' here, you young dandy! go on; get right off! I won't have no sech fool on my sidewalk;" and Parks, mumbling about other people being fools, retreated before Ebenezer's savage glare, and went sullenly on his way.

"Now, perhaps, we can do some business," said Ebenezer, turning to the rector.

The rector never doubted Mr. Green's honesty, and the sale of Jack was consummated; but Green never forgave Parks. And when it came about, later, that Joshua Sanford, after many sittings in this and that high-backed chair in his store, with his spectacles upon his forehead and his eyes fixed on this or that tea-cannister, or some sugar-barrel, or on something outside of the window altogether, after oft-repeated runnings of his finger up and down this and that account in his ledger, — when, at length, Joshua Sanford took the step, and a new sign "Sanford & Parks" appeared on the grocery, then Ebenezer's resentment became only more deeply seated; though that same news brought great delight to the heart of Parks' gray-haired mother, off in another Connecticut town among the hills. There are loving hearts in the world, even for those whom we do not like, — praised be fate! And when, shortly after this, the announcement was made of the engagement of Parks to Miss Julia Bayne, then the whole current of Green's life was thrown over against the opposite bank to that where the Baynes and Sanfords and Parkses stood; and when the oyster war broke out, many and bitter were Green's words.

And many and sharp were the words all round the town; and in the thick of them, as in the thick of a fray, stood the black-garbed, rosy-faced, blue-eyed

figure of Sister Frances, — quite the property of the town, a public character.

"Shameful! was n't it?" said the ladies, "that a Sister of Charity should be mixed in such a mess! so brazen and bold! and after all that Marsy business too; this was just a part of it!"

So the tongues would wag, of a summer afternoon, behind the green shutters of the Marshton houses; and the incense from these village altars arose to heaven, where, perchance, it was fanned back again, as a noisome odor, by the angel who keeps the gates.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CONSEQUENT AGITATION OF THE REV. MR. CLERKENWELL AND SISTER FRANCES.

MR. CLERKENWELL'S ecclesiastical office hung upon his shoulders with so much weight, that, although he had no official connection with the House of Good-Will, he deemed it a part of his duties to keep an eye on the spiritual concerns of the order. Perhaps he was the more prompted to this oversight from the fact that he hoped some day, now that Mr. Farrington was dead, to become the chaplain of the establishment. At any rate, it was not long after the "Lucy" had set out on her daily cruises to Goodhope, with all the Marshton oysters on board but Mr. Bayne's, that the rector took it upon himself to visit the convent and impart to Sister Ambrosia his views on Sister Frances' part in that commercial transaction.

Now, Sister Ambrosia had no less respect for the apostolic office of rector than Mr. Clerkenwell himself had; and when he expressed his sentiment regarding Sister Frances' conduct, to the effect that it was shameful for a cloistered Sister to trail her sacred skirts in the secular filth of the Goodhope fish-markets, she

felt in duty bound to pay reverent heed to her spiritual counsellor's words.

None the less, she was distracted with inward conflict. She loved Frances, and would, if left to her own natural feelings, have sheltered her from every hostility of the world, no matter from what quarter. And she loved her still, for all the rector had to say. But Sister Ambrosia was a humble woman, and it would have seemed to her vainglorious, nay, wicked, to allow her own feelings to hold sway against the admonition of one who had felt the laying on of hands. But more than once, as she revolved the matter in her mind, Mr. Clerkenwell appeared before her divested of his clerical robes, as simple, human Mr. Clerkenwell; and not over-estimable as a human being, either, as she found herself thinking. Such presumptuousness on her part, however, was quickly repressed, as often as it appeared, as an unruly manifestation of the flesh; and it was only after many sighs over the difficulty of the position she had been forced into, that she brought herself, with high purpose, to the point of administering to Sister Frances the reprimand suggested by the rector.

She consoled herself, indeed, with the thought that, in communicating this reprimand, she was not acting in her individual capacity, but only as the trustee of the interests of the Sisterhood; she really stood only as one against whom the re-animated dust of the founders of this charity might make a charge of dereliction in her

trust, if she should omit to discharge this disagreeable task.

One day she called Sister Frances to her and took her to her own room, apart from the one where she usually saw the Sisters. When they were seated, she said: "Sister Frances, dear, I want to talk to you in a kind way, as a mother might to her child. What I have to say may not be pleasing to you, but I wish you to think of me as a mother speaking to her daughter. Do you think you can imagine me to be as kindly disposed toward you as your mother might have been?"

"You startle me," the Sister replied; "but I assure you, Sister Ambrosia, I cannot believe that you would ever have any but the kindest feeling toward me or any one."

"I want to make it more personal than that. I want you to think that I am very reluctant in saying what I am going to; and that my heart dreads it, as a mother's might."

"What is it?" asked Frances, nervously, though there was a slight smile on her face; but Sister Ambrosia's fingers drummed unrestfully on the table.

"A Sister's life is quite a narrow one," she began. "It is, it should be, a holy one; a life apart from the world; a walk with one's face constantly toward heaven, with the spirit of peace pervading it."

It was only the laying down of a general principle, but it struck Frances that there was something

about it not quite satisfactory; and she said, "Is not a holy life a broad one, Sister, instead of a narrow one?"

"There is, it is true, Frances, no life in which one may not be holy, in which one may not have one's face toward heaven always. But a Sister is called, is she not, to a special career, — an unmixing with the affairs of the world? Is not the office of the Sister, ideally, one of majestic calm, from which she looks down upon the world about her in a repose that nothing on earth can disturb? Does she not, by her steadfast composure, spread abroad the truth of the littleness of this world and its affairs? Should she not be a radiant figure, shedding around the pure light of heaven? Is not that her distinctive office?"

"I cannot answer you no," responded Frances; "there is truth in what you say."

"Think," continued the elder Sister, interrupting her, — "think of all our Sisters in the past; what makes the glory of all those charitable orders? What gives their history dignity, and marks them off as a total, distinctly from the ordinary world? What would there be of influence in them, if they engaged in ordinary pursuits, — if commerce or business had employed their energies at all?"

"Commerce," rejoined Frances, "is usually pursued for profit. I know now, of course, what you are alluding to. There was no profit looked for in my affair. It was to help the Bailey family out of their distress, —

and not merely physical distress, but a demoralization as well."

"I have no doubt of your motive, dear, not the least; it was only the mixing in the affairs of the world, that I had in my mind."

"But think!" said Frances. "You mentioned the matter of Sisters engaging in business. Suppose they had done it in the past, not as a body, but as circumstances seemed to require, to save people's lives, or to make them comfortable, and to make real men and women of them. Would that make the order lose its lustre?"

"It is not the reposeful, heavenlike type of life, dear."

"Is n't the question this, after all, Sister Ambrosia, — how far a Sister's life is practical, and how far poetical? Is it, or is it not, divine to go about, walking on the earth, practically doing good, with your face toward the earth, though your thought may be aspiring; or is it only divine to live in that seraphic majesty of calm, above the earth? If one meets evil-doing in the world, is not one to combat it? Is one to yield and see it successful? That seems to me like shirking."

"Alas! Sister," returned the other, "for us, nursing and helping is better than fighting."

"But if helping consists in fighting, necessitates fighting, as in my case?"

"Are you sure it did, Sister? Could not Mr. Bayne have been influenced for good?"

Frances shook her head. But she said, a moment afterward: "I don't believe it could have been done. I am sure, not directly. I did think of going to Miss Bayne, who, I suppose, is her father's pet, — as she deserves to be, — and telling her how it all was and asking her to intercede. But I thought it over, and concluded not to. I did not think it would be quite in good taste to intrude into the relation between father and daughter with such an errand; besides, my intervention would have come to his knowledge, and he would only have laughed at my poor device. No; I think it was better to do just as I did, and let him alone; and just attend to our own business, and quietly send the oysters off to market in another way."

It seemed to Sister Ambrosia, really, as if the rector's view had not very much to do with such a simple, practical, and peaceable matter, as this diversion of a lot of oysters from one channel of trade to another. She mused a few moments, thinking whether there was anything else that she wished to say. As she was meditating thus, Frances said, somewhat impulsively, "Sister Ambrosia, do *you* think ill of me?"

The Sister was startled by the emphatic designation of herself. "I — why, my dear?"

"I did not think you would — for that."

Sister Ambrosia vouchsafed no reply at first. But the truth was that she was rather resenting this having been placed in the position of correcting her companion, almost needlessly as she now thought; and she said

in a moment of weakness, "Mr. Clerkenwell and I spoke of it."

It was an indiscreet utterance from one point of view.

When Sister Frances left the apartment where she had received the admonitory and well-meant words of the head Sister, and had closed the door behind her and stood in the hall, she felt, indeed, alone in the world. The bare, white walls around her seemed cold and heartless. Even the Sisters, her associates within the convent, took on a semblance of hostility to her. She did not care for them. The blood rose to her face, as she stood there and thought of the indignity of that rebuke from Sister Ambrosia. She hated them. But did she, in truth? Could she hate Sister Ambrosia or Sister Agnes? No; not them. But that this holy place, that she had fled to for refuge, should chide her!

Then she stopped and considered, and a feeling of scorn rose in her breast. It was only the rector, after all, and not any established good, not even the House of Good-Will, that was accusing her. Who was he, she proudly asked herself, who might question the fulness of her motive in her entry upon the cloistered life? Who was he who questioned the fulness of her motive in its practice? Did he love suffering mortals more than she did? Was he deeper-hearted toward the poor and lowly? Was he more sensitively religious than she? Did he see God more in the world than she? Did his

heart beat more responsively than hers to the Great Spirit present in the universe? She laughed as she thought of it.

But even her scorn grew more gentle at last. There fell upon her vision that soft stream of light that lies across the world, the same peaceful effulgence that Sister Ambrosia had alluded to, proceeding from all the feminine, cloistered devotion of the past, from that very life of limitation and rubric that she found small. Sublimity, as one looked back into the distance, seemed to dwell upon that radiant line of peace and narrow consecration. She even bowed her head in a sort of thoughtful reverence before this vision. But she raised it soon. "It is a false form for me," she said aloud, "whatever it is for others, whatever Mr. Clerkenwell's conception is;" and her lip curled again as she thought of the rector. "I will be true to myself!" she said more loudly; "I will live genuinely. I will not live a hollow life in another's form. I will not assume these truths of others and wear them as shams; the womanliness that I was born with shall be my strength; I cannot reach high up through another's habit."

With a swelling heart, and teeming with the energy of her own thoughts, she walked forth out of the convent. The rush of her feeling disturbed her poise. The impulse to be real alone possessed her.

She went down the avenue of cedars to the road, and took her way along it toward the village. It was summer now. The disorderly luxuriance of foliage

hung, as usual, over the borders of the roadway. As she walked along on the grass, the stray branches would have brushed her face, had she not pushed them aside with her hand or stooped under them. But there was no irritation at these obstructions to her course; they were a part of Nature, winding out their slender, graceful way into the universe around them as the unaccountable bends and quirks in their unfolding growth led them. Respected stems! seeking their way and living their life under God's law. It might not be man's way. He would have lopped them off, — intruders upon the path he travelled. What path, forsooth? What superior righteousness to his path that he should claim it free and unobstructed? She could have hugged the whole straggling green roadside to her breast, in its character of expressing a divine and not a human rule of growth.

When she reached the turnpike, she did not go down toward the village, but turned again to the right and went on toward the Salisbury house. She had a notion that it would be agreeable to see the artist, a man who had much communion with Nature. She turned into the walk and went up to the house. The afternoon sun was upon it, and the blinds were shut and it looked deserted. But as she was about to go up the steps, she saw, lolling in a hammock on the porch and half hidden by the vines, the figure of a young man. He was reading a book and smoking a cigarette. She thought it must be Mr. Monito, a young Italian, an artist, whom

she had heard of as occasionally spending a few days with Mr. Salisbury. He rose to a respectful posture as she passed across the porch. She rang the bell; and the servant came, and said, in response to her question, that she thought both Mr. and Mrs. Salisbury were out; at the same time, she looked inquiringly at the youth. "Yes," he said in corroboration, with a rather pleasant foreign accent; "they have both gone away." Then he slipped out of the hammock and coming forward continued with an easy manner: "I think this must be Sister Frances, of whom I have heard my friends speak. You must be tired and warm with your walk. Pray, won't you walk in and rest? I think they will be home soon."

He was a handsome fellow, this young Italian, with his jet black hair, his dark brown eyes and olive skin. It was not a strong-looking face, but a very regular one. He had on a velvet coat, slippers, and a loosely caught cravat; and looked as if he might have just left an easel for a few moments of rest in the hammock, with his book and cigarette. As he spoke to the Sister, there was a directness of gaze into her eyes that made her think he had disturbed his rest more for his own pleasure than out of politeness to her; and yet hospitality had been so much a part of his action, that his gaze did not seem quite rude.

"Thank you," she said, with something of a haughty air; "I think I will rest in the parlor awhile." She did not like the idea of being frightened off by a

respectful gaze, even if it was wishful; nor had she yet decided but that she would wait a little while for the return of her friends.

She went into the parlor and seated herself; and Alessandro Monito, as she saw through the half-open blinds that reached down to the piazza floor, returned to his hammock, and lit a fresh cigarette. At first he held up his book as before; but soon he let it fall, and seemed to be gazing listlessly off across the lawn, upon the distant and hazy hills beyond. Occasionally through the window there came in slowly on the slightly moving summer air, as if entering the darkened precincts of the parlor timidly, stray bits of fragrance from the Egyptian cigarette. The aroma of the tobacco from the Orient somehow blended with the impressions received by the Sister from the lounging figure itself outside. There was a languor in his air; a carelessness of movement that was a sort of negligent gracefulness. His brow and well-turned temples gave a suggestion of mental repose; of thoughts that did not much transcend our earthly atmosphere and yet that were engaged, upon the earth, with the delicate and refined phases of its life. There was relaxation in his posture. Song and painting were about him, and not grave responsibility, nor the American whiz of steam.

She was disturbed in the reception of these pleasant impressions, by his hastily sitting upright and fumbling in his pocket for something. At length he produced a card, and coming in through the window, he presented

her with it, begging her pardon for forgetting to introduce himself.

"Thanks," she said; "I have heard Mrs. Salisbury mention you."

He stood before her in a doubting attitude, ready to go at the slightest evidence of her wish, and yet plainly preferring to stay if he were allowed.

"May I get you a glass of water?" he asked.

"Yes, if you will."

When she handed the glass back to him, she gave with it a glance that informed him of her knowledge that he was proceeding irregularly. But it was also a permission, and he took his seat on the revolving piano-stool, in a sort of Bohemian style, ready to go on the slightest expression of her wishes. It was quite evident that to him this bright-colored face with its steadfast eyes and the self-confident behavior, contrasting with the solemn Sister's guise, was rather piquant.

"Are you fond of music?" he asked.

"When it is good," she answered indifferently.

"I dare not play for you, then."

"Nor sing?"

"It would be in Italian."

"Ah, well, I don't care for it, in that case."

He laughed at her capricious, commanding way.

"Why do you laugh?" she asked.

He did not answer at once; his eyes were on the floor. She withdrew the foot that was slightly protruding from her dress, and he then looked up.

"I must not tell you," he answered; "it would not be polite."

"Tell me!" she said imperiously, with a little stamp of her foot.

He could not discover whether it was a mock or a real imperiousness. In either case he thought she was an entertaining woman, considering her profession.

"Do you insist on it?" he asked.

"Of course," she replied, turning her head aside with a gesture of impatience.

"I was laughing at your very pleasing manner; all the more pleasing because one sees it in a woman clad as you are."

An apprehensiveness was traceable on his face as he awaited her reception of the last clause.

"Is that all? That is nothing," she said. Presently she added, as she rose and went to the open window, "I am rested now; I think I will go." But she paused at the window, and he joined her. They stood side by side for a few moments, with their garments just enough in contact to give to each of them a sense of touch.

"Your hammock looks as if it needed somebody in it," she said at length.

"Won't you take it?" he asked.

She turned away from him with an air of displeasure at his perversion of her words, and went out upon the piazza and toward the steps. If she were going, there was no reason why she should not have bidden him adieu and gone then. But she stopped midway, and

turning round, pouted. It was an invitation to him to accompany her, and he prepared to do so, saying, "I hope I may have the pleasure of going with you to the gate?"

She looked into his face and for answer said, "I told you your hammock was empty."

"And so it shall continue to be, if you will not take it," he boldly replied, joining her. They went down the steps together and across the grass toward a side gate that gave her a shorter way home. As they neared the gate, he sighed and said: "It is a pity to leave off tramping this grass so soon on such an afternoon."

"Why should n't you keep on," she asked, "if you like it?"

"Ah, yes; but without you?"

"To be sure. I should get tired of it after a while. You are not so weak that you need a woman's presence to keep you up to such agreeable work?"

"Oh," taking her answer in some earnestness, "you Americans are so hard and unpoetic! With an afternoon like this in Italy, we would revel in it. Hark! do you hear that? It is the hum of that factory. That is where your brains go in this country. It is a constant whir, whir. Pleasant fields and brooks and shade, plenty of bright Nature; but it is all neglected. See how serious these men look, coming along the road with their load of hay! The Italian peasant is poor, but he would be laughing and singing with his load of hay. Oh, you catch none of the dream of life! You

all make money, more than you want. I am sorry for you."

They had reached the gate, and she had passed through it and closed it behind her. He leaned upon one end of it, and she upon the other. A thick, tall growth of hollyhocks shot up their brilliant spindles on one side of them, and a cluster of sunflower plants on the other. The bees were buzzing about, and the light wind was ruffling the short sprouts of the lawn grass, while the sun breathed upon all the life-giving warmth. Alessandro threw back his head, and sniffed in the passing odor of some hidden neighboring blossoms. "Oh, it is delicious, this Nature!" he said, under his breath.

"There would be no care, would there," she said, in a moment of seriousness, "if we only knew little enough; if we were only a little more a part of Nature?"

"There would be the care of getting a living."

"Oh, dear me, that would be a pleasure, if one could get it in a natural way, and not like a machine."

"An artist has that pleasure," he said, laughing, "if it is one."

His laugh was light. It fitted in well with the sunshine of the bright mid-afternoon; with the wide stretch of green grass; with the varied colors of the hollyhocks and sunflowers; with the light passing of the breeze; with the voices of the insects and birds; with his own good-natured, handsome face, and his lounging

ease of manner. He and his laugh seemed a part of Nature's hearty life.

"An artist tells secrets," she said.

"Never!" he answered solemnly.

She laughed at his assumed misunderstanding of her meaning. "Then, if you won't tell me any secrets, I must go on my way;" and she stepped out into the path.

"I have told you mine, already. Won't you commit yours to me?"

"I did not say I had any," she answered.

"Oh! but it is in your eyes."

"Eyes are misleading."

"They are tell-tale."

"There is no need of my telling, then, if you can read."

"I can only read the general; I must guess the particulars. Or I will paint your eyes, if I can, and let other people join in the guessing. You are right; artists do not tell secrets. They guess them from Nature, and then go in league with her, and put them to the world and set it guessing them again." She turned away.

"Shall I say good-by now?" he asked.

She gave him only a careless nod, and went on her way; after a few steps she loosened the strings of her bonnet, and went swinging it in her hand. Alessandro was still leaning over the gate and watching her. He was tempted now to join her again; but some

feeling of delicacy intervened at last and restrained him.

Frances did not turn into the convent yard when she reached it, but went on along the road; and finally, striking across the meadow, came out upon the rocks where she had had the memorable parting with Marsy. Not thinking of that occasion, however, at the moment, she took a seat there; but it came to her presently, and she arose and went wandering on along the beach. The tide was ebbing; leaving bits of sea-weed stretched along the sand, and the sand itself wet and hard under her feet. The pebbles shone with their recent washing, and bleached old clam-shells reared their edges here and there through the sand. The afternoon sun threw a wide shadow on the beach from the meadow bank above, wide enough to keep the dry, upper sands of the shore in shade. The land breeze came whisking off the bank and met the light surf, blowing the thin edge of its crest back into the sea again, in spray; and going on, out over the Sound, gave its waters the peculiar deep blue color that the northwest wind always gives.

At length, coming to a boulder under the bank, she seated herself again, for the few minutes that remained before she would be expected at the convent. She had not been there long, however, before she heard the sound of children's voices; and soon, around a point of the shore, there came the whole troop of the Bailey children, baby and all, — clamorous and with dragging

steps and general signs of a fatiguing tramp. As they drew near, they espied the Sister sitting on the rock, and Jimmy came vaulting up to her on his one leg and crutch.

"How do you do, Sister?" he said, snatching his torn straw hat off, his face all aglow with the excitement of the afternoon.

"Where have you all been?" asked Frances.

The whole party came running up now, and it was evident what their errand had been; for they all carried baskets or pails, even the baby, more or less laden with blackberries.

"Oh, Sister, look at our berries!" was the general cry; and a row of crowding receptacles was pushed under her eyes. The excitement was rather amusing; but she soon noticed traces of tears on the faces of two or three of them; and the baby, scarcely two years old, was now and again convulsed by sobs from some past, almost forgotten grief.

"What is the matter, children?" asked the Sister.

"Oh!" answered Susy, "we was ever so far up the beach, and we got tired; and besides we got scratched on the bushes, and we thought we was n't ever goin' to get home; but we are almost there now, and we won't be late, neither."

"It 's all right now, ma'am," added Jimmy, who spoke as the generalissimo. "We 've got a heap of berries. Won't you have some?"

He presented his basket, that was slung by a

string over his shoulder. "The baby 's tired, though. We 've been carrying her, taking turns, — all but me ; I could n't. She 's tired, though."

Here the baby, finding herself alluded to, and having exhausted the excitement of the discovery of the Sister, set up a loud howl, in resumption of her grief. The poor little thing was indeed in a plight. Her socks were down over her shoes, and her little legs were red and bloody with the scratches of the briers. Her long apron, and her face as well, was smeared with berry-stains. Her hat hung on her neck by its strings, and in her hand she held a tiny pail with a half-dozen berries in it, — her contribution to the fund of saved berries ; she was ambitious to do as the other children. Now, when she had once stopped to rest, and the thought of all the afternoon's misadventures came back to her, she was hopelessly overcome.

"Come here, dear ! " said Frances, in a pitying tone ; and the little thing came and put its arms, in total abandonment, about her neck ; and all the berries in her little pail tumbled out on the sand ; but she did not know it, nor heed it, when the others cried, "Oh, look at Baby's berries ! " All unknown to her they picked them up again and dropped them in her pail.

The Sister arose with her little human burden, and they all trudged on toward the Bailey homestead, — the baby receiving much soothing from her nurse, and in a few minutes going off into a sound sleep. In this fashion, just as Mrs. Bailey was beginning to look up

and down the road with anxious eyes for her family, the troop came in sight and rushed upon their home with a final charge. The baby awoke with the extreme clamor, and was set down in a state of numbness before the mother, with the pail again in her little hand, and in it still the half-dozen berries. It had been, on the whole, a successful raid; and Jimmy stumped round the yard in consciousness of power as he accumulated the forage by the kitchen door.

That evening, as Sister Ambrosia bade Frances good-night, she grasped her hand and held it tightly for a moment. "Good-night," answered the younger Sister, and returned the pressure; and there was such a frank look of friendship on her face that the good head-Sister was sure she was forgiven, if perchance she had need of forgiveness.

But before Frances crept into her bed that night, she threw open her window to the wind, that was rushing from the northwest in a gale. It burst upon her in her thin attire with a shock of cold, and swept her hair back. But it was a welcome blast. She inhaled it to the full. Free wind! how it rejoiced in its unstopping flight! What elation it breathed! How the stars glittered in the sky! "Sweep on, wind!" she said almost aloud, in her ecstasy; "do you not come from heaven?" But the next moment she sank down and bowed her head. "Ah, me! does not patience, too, come from heaven? Is it not great to endure?"

CHAPTER XXV.

A DISCOVERY.

EARLY in the following spring there befell a strange affair in Marshton, — a matter so far removed from the ordinary, daily experience of life, that it passed, wreathing fantastic clouds about itself, into the region of the romantic, and there still abides, a changeful, many-sided thing to the speculative gaze of the inhabitants of the village. It was as if some gray spirit of the past had ventured earthward, and emerged upon our terrestrial life clad in dusty, parchment-like garb, connecting the heart-beats of our living day with certain vague and hazy transactions of the earlier part of the century.

In the course of keeping the physical House of Good-Will in a good state of repair, and, in particular, of curing a smokiness in the chimney-flue that passed up through Sister Cecilia's room, the masons and carpenters in their ripping up made a discovery. They found the breast of the chimney in that room to be a false front of wood, which had been, at some remote day, plastered over and made to resemble a solid wall; and on detaching the wooden facing, they came upon a recess, a sort of long cupboard, whose back was the real breast of the chimney. Here, in various loosely

built piles, lay a number of papers. The workmen handed them out to Sister Cecilia, who happened to be in the room at the moment; and she, transferring them to her own temporary apartment in something of a flutter at such a discovery, hastily examined them. They proved to be, for the most part, letters of ancient date, going back, the farthest, into the last century. Some of the names were unknown to her; but the majority bore the signature of Eugene Marsy, and were addressed to his "dear friend John." This John she divined to be John Delacroix, Marie Delacroix's grandfather, whom she had heard to be a fast friend of Eugene Marsy, both now almost forgotten. She did not stop, however, to read these letters; but when she had cursorily examined them, took up for inspection the one paper that was unlike the others. She opened it; and it opened a sheet of folio size, and began with the words, "This Indenture." A deed, veritably! The Sister's face flushed with subdued excitement as she skimmed through the document. It was dated in 1820, and ran from Edward Marsy to Marie Delacroix, in trust for certain purposes, to wit, "the use of the Sisters of the House of Good-Will," in their capacity of ministers to the poor, etc. The land conveyed was described by courses and metes and bounds, and the Sister found herself unable to identify the tract. A shade of disappointment crossed her face. Very likely this was the deed under which the present holding had been acquired, — not a conveyance of lands hitherto

unenjoyed. She re-read and read again the description. But she had no knowledge of the landmarks mentioned. The only clew to the location of the property was the words of the grantor, wherein he described the "foregoing parcel" as "being the residue of the lands in the town of Marshton inherited by me from my father, Philip Marsy." Might this not be, then, the farm of the present John Marsy, hitherto illegally possessed by him?

She went, with the deed and all the other papers in her hands, to Sister Ambrosia. That good woman was surprised to see her companion enter with such a dusty and ancient-looking pile of documents. Sister Cecilia was grave, under the possible importance of her papery treasure. She deposited the letters on the table, and handing the deed to the Superior, said: "Please read that, Sister. Perhaps you will know something about it. I don't know whether it is important or not."

Sister Ambrosia adjusted her spectacles, and with difficulty plodded through the verbiage of the deed. When she finished, she swept her glance over the body of words again; and then she rubbed the paper between thumb and finger, as if feeling its age; then she carefully inspected with her eyes the paper and the ink, and turning it over read the indorsement twice. At last she looked up over her glasses and said, "I know nothing of this, Sister; where did it come from?"

"From a cupboard in my room, which the carpenters knocked open."

"That is very strange," murmured the elder Sister.

"What is it?" asked the younger, burning with curiosity; "is it the deed of this property that we occupy now?"

"I do not think it can be," answered Sister Ambrosia. "I have that deed already in my keeping; and the property described here does not seem to be the same as that mentioned in my deed. Besides, that is to Marie Delacroix, the founder of our Sisterhood, from Philip Marsy; while this is from Edward Marsy to her. It is very singular. I must look at the cupboard."

She arose and left the room with Sister Cecilia.

The head Sister was much puzzled with the result of her examination. Sure enough, there the cupboard was, — a sort of housing, backed up against the retreating breast of the chimney, its floor being made by the mantel-piece itself extended backward. The top and the swinging door of the cupboard were still in their places; only, the front of laths that had been nailed against the front of the cupboard had been torn off; the door had a lock on it; but there was no key, and it had been found unlocked. It seemed very queer. How could the lath and plaster have been put on over the unlocked door of a depository containing such an apparently valuable paper as this? Why should the owner of such a paper, Marie Delacroix herself, not have missed it, and had the plaster knocked off and taken it out? It was impossible that she should not have known it was

there. Or how did it happen that her successor and Sister Ambrosia's immediate predecessor, Sister Marca, had never known of this deed, or never acted upon it? However the paper came to its hiding-place, it came there before the present trustee's time; for the chimney-front had been untouched as long as she had been in the house. The thought passed through her mind of some recent tampering, the result of some sort of undefined conspiracy, of some dark purpose. But there was no reasonable ground for the suspicion. Sister Cecilia was in the room, and saw the cupboard as it was laid bare, with the papers in it, smoky and brown. It was entirely probable that the document had lain there for years. But how, in any sort of likelihood, could it have been put there without the grantee's knowing it, and how was it that she had never taken the property into possession? It was a mystery that resisted solution.

The next day she went to Goodhope and consulted her legal adviser. A couple of days afterward he called upon the Superior, and told her that there could be no question about the property described in the deed being the farm now held in possession by John Marsy; he had established the identity by reference to the county records, by a discovery of some of the landmarks and by a survey made therefrom. But he could not explain, any better than she, why no one had taken any action under the grant. He suggested, indeed, that possibly the deed had been lodged with the occupant of the room, where it was found, in escrow, and that the con-

dition of its delivery had never come about. But that suggestion, he added, was wholly confidential and should not be imparted to any one. Besides, on the theory of an escrow, it was difficult to account for the deed's being found side by side with a lot of letters addressed to Marie Delacroix the grantee. It would seem as if the deed had been delivered to her. On the whole, it was a mysterious case. Coming to the practical aspect of the matter, however, he advised Sister Ambrosia that she, as trustee succeeding to Marie Delacroix, was legally bound to accept the conveyance of the property and to take measures to reduce it to possession; in other words, to oust Mr. Marsy.

At this announcement the Sister was wholly upset. She could not have looked more distressed if the lawyer had been a doctor revealing to her that she had the plague. It was a possibility that she had thought about, in a vague way, but she had never been brought face to face with the fact that she was bound in law to eject her neighbor from his supposed demesne. "Dear, dear!" thought the Sister, "is this conflict between my personal inclination and my official duty never to end?" She had in mind her conference of a few months before, with Sister Frances.

The lawyer departed, and the head Sister held a solemn meeting with her associates. "My sisters," she said, in laying the matter before them, "it is unnecessary for me to tell you of the finding of this deed which I hold in my hands. In fact, as Mr. Stanhope informs

me, the discovery of it is known throughout the town, as well as to you, through the inquiries that he was obliged to make and through the reports of the carpenters. In taking action in the case, therefore, we must not forget that it has become public; and that, perhaps, should incite us to even a more careful consideration, if anything, of the matter, than our own consciences would prompt us to; to the end that we may set a fair example to others, by our conduct. Yet I cannot hope that I shall escape criticism in the course I fear I shall have to follow. I could almost wish that I were free from the bonds of my office as trustee, in order that I might act according to my sincere wish; and that would be, to deed back the land at once to its present possessor. I am informed that Mr. Marsy is very much attached to his ancestral estate, and it will undoubtedly be a great, a very great, disappointment to him, if he is obliged to give it up. I am sure that in such a case the dictate of our ordinary human sympathy, which I know actuates you all in your lives, would be that it would be unkind and unchristian to disturb him. For we do not need this land; we have means sufficient already for our proper needs. To be sure, there can always be found good ways for the charitable use of money; but we should have to look for such ways, if we had more means; they do not lie immediately open before us. But I am very much distressed to know from Mr. Stanhope, that it is my legal duty to accept this deed, and to take steps to gain possession of this

property. The alternative is before me of resigning my post, or doing what it would greatly pain me to do. In this exigency I have sought the assistance of prayer and of careful meditation; and I cannot reconcile it with a strong life to yield my duty to my feeling. At best, it would only remain for my successor to do what I had not the strength to do; and the result would be the same as to the disposition of the property, whoever was the agent to move under this deed. In this state of things I have thought it best, before taking any action, to call you together and hear what counsel each of you may have it in mind to give."

There was silence. At length a tear or two began to trickle down Sister Agnes' cheeks. She wiped them away, however, and spoke: "I do not see how you can do it, Sister Ambrosia. It seems as if it was right against all the feelings that animate us in our life here. We set out to do good, and find it our duty, our legal duty, to do harm. It is the law that makes us do this selfish act; not our hearts, nor our own wills. Are not our rules of life higher than the law? Should we not, in any event, be true to our professions?"

"The law," responded the head Sister, "is essential to civilized society. It is the great promoter of peace; a great sub-structure for human brotherhood. I do not see how we can decline to conform to it, and be consistent. It may seem now to lead away from our aims in one way; but in the long run it must lead toward them; and as a settled rule of action, and not a chang-

ing one, it seems to me we ought to follow the law. Nothing but disturbance is likely to come, in general, from the following of any other rule."

"It seems to me the law is not perfect," said Agnes; "there have been cases where human law has been resisted from good motives, and where we praise the resistance, because the law was bad."

"That is the difficulty, Sister," answered the Superior; "this law, affecting trustees, is not bad in general, as we must all admit; only, it is a hardship in this particular case."

Sister Agnes looked unconvinced, but said no more.

"Why," asked Sister Cecilia, — "why is it not right to consider that in taking this land *we* are not taking it, but that it is being added to the kingdom of God? Is not His glory and strength here on earth to be esteemed above the comfort of a single human being? Is not that enough? And in that way does not the human law agree with the divine law, instead of being bad?"

Sister Ambrosia did not answer; and Sister Frances spoke. "It is a practical question," she said. "On one side, we have Mr. Marsy's feelings, I mean his disappointment and pain; on the other side, we have all the pleasure and good of the poor who will, first and last, be benefited by our possession of this property. Balance his pain against the whole amount of pleasure and benefit to be rendered to the poor and needy, and which should control? Will not more good be done by our accepting than by our rejecting the benefit of

this deed? And should we not choose as Sisters, even as Sister Agnes says, what is in accord with real human sympathy, and accept the benefit?"

"It is a hard case, indeed," said the head Sister at last, as no one spoke further, "to solve in any other way than by being firm of purpose and broad of view. I see no way but to follow Mr. Stanhope's advice."

A desultory conversation ensued, but it did not change the aspect of the case to any of the Sisters' minds or that of their Superior.

When the conclave had broken up, however, and the Sisters were leaving, Frances loitered behind. She stepped up to Sister Ambrosia, when they were alone, and asked, "Sister, what would be the equivalent in money, do you think, of that property?"

The head Sister cast a startled glance upon her junior for a moment, but quickly relapsed into her usual bearing and said, as if laboring over the subject in her mind: "I really can't tell you, Frances. I do not know the value of the land; I only know, from Mr. Stanhope, that there are about three hundred acres in the farm; and then there are the buildings, you know. The homestead is a large house, and there is the farm-house too; and besides, there is the old parsonage with its outbuildings; and some of the oystermen's cottages, I think, go with the property. I presume you are thinking whether Mr. Marsy might not wish to redeem the property with money. Mr. Stanhope mentioned that."

"Did he mention it?"

"Yes."

Frances left Sister Ambrosia, with the resolution which had been forming in her mind for several days finally taken, and wended her way to Mr. Bradbury's. She walked into the house and looked into the library. Uncle Luther was there, reading. After their greetings were exchanged, she said, "I have come to see you on business."

"Again?" he queried, referring to the oyster trade.

"It is not about oysters this time."

"What, then, Frances?"

"It is about this Marsy property."

"That is a bad business," said he, shaking his head and becoming grave at the mention of it; "that is a bad business. I don't understand it."

"I don't know any one who does understand it, Uncle. It is a puzzle."

"It is more serious than a puzzle, my child. If any one could account reasonably and satisfactorily for the deed's getting there, could tell *how* it got there, it might throw some light on the question whether a delivery of it was ever really intended. It seems to me incredible that a delivery could have been intended, and yet no step, that any one knows of, ever have been taken to acquire possession;" and Luther shook his head again.

"What do you think will be the outcome?"

"I don't know. Nobody knows whether Marsy has

any special knowledge — it may be he has — of his family matters, which would account for the document being where it was."

"What do you think the property is worth, Uncle?"

"Well, I should say, on an ordinary sale, somewhere about $40,000, possibly $35,000. What do you Sisters think about it?"

"Sister Ambrosia says she is advised that she must assert her title to the property under the deed."

"That is so, that is so," he answered, nodding; "she is right. I should imagine it might go against her grain to do it, though; she is a woman of kind instincts."

"I think it does go hard with her," said Frances.

"Poor Marsy! it will be a disappointment to him, to lose that land. A year or two ago I was talking with him about it. He said he did not care to sell it, for any price. He was attached to it on account of the old family associations."

"Uncle," she said, inclining her head on one side and speaking in a magniloquent tone humorously assumed, "I wish to buy off the Sisterhood's title to that land, and I wish you to transact the business for me; will you do it, sir?"

The old gentleman smiled at her air; and yet there was a troubled look on his face, as he regarded his niece propped up in a jaunty fashion against the back of a chair. He half believed that she meant what she said.

"Will you?" she repeated.

But he only stared at her still, and at last his jaw

fairly dropped before her fixed posture and gaze. "You don't *mean* it, Frances?" he at length found voice to say.

"Yes, sir; certainly I mean it," she replied in the same assumed tone. "Will you oblige me?"

He rose from his chair, and putting his hands under his coat-tails strode up and down the room. Rash girl! It was in this very room, a few years before, that she had been determined upon what he thought a false step, and he had withstood her. That was a long time ago! Many things had happened since then, — many things to him, Luther, as well as to her. He was a broader man than he was six years ago. He had found some strains of a philosophy in this niece of his, that had changed his way of looking at things somewhat. At first there was an enormous shock. Thirty or forty thousand dollars to that convent, to quiet Marsy's title! How hard that money had been earned! The child did not know the value of money! Did she not, though? and Luther winked one eye, by himsélf, as he walked. Here was a great secret. It was whether Marsy or the Sisterhood should get the property, was it? And Frances was for Marsy's getting it? That was n't such a bad use to make of money, after all.

To tell the truth, Luther was getting on toward the grave. Friendships looked larger to him than they used to, and money smaller. Here was a woman! And she was not against her Sisterhood, either; would it not get the equivalent of the land in cash? Here

was a genuine heart! And Luther, who was every bit as stanch friend as he was money-maker, wheeled round upon his niece, who still kept her nonchalant air and the dull look of shamelessness in her eyes, and said, laughing almost hysterically: "Will I do it for you? Will I do it for you, Frances? Ha, ha! won't I, my child? Come here!" and as she advanced toward him, with moisture in her eyes at his emotion, he put his broad hands on her shoulders, and looking into her face with much fondness, ended his demonstration by wringing her hand. This indirect confession of hers, the sturdy attachment, and sense of right were too much for him, and with a nervous movement he dashed his abundant silk handkerchief across his eyes and crowded it into his pocket again with a jam. He stood for a minute or two, with his back turned on his niece. There was much for him to think about, but very little, as he felt, for him to say. At last he arose and closely scrutinized Frances' face. It was quite composed.

"You are bent on this?" he said.

"Quite," she answered.

"Will you let me share it with you?"

"No, sir."

"No, of course not; I was a fool to ask that."

She laughed. "What are you going to do, sir?"

"Why, see Chalmers, I suppose. I hear that Joslyn has notified him of the state of affairs."

"And what then?"

"I can tell better afterwards." After reflecting a

moment, he said, "I suppose you know, Frances, that this is likely to be a public thing, — what you do? You have thought of that?"

"I don't care for that," she answered, with a defiant toss of her head. "I will see you again, sir, in a day or two," she said with the same commanding air, and so took her leave.

As it happened, Mr. Chalmers was in Marshton that day, and Luther met him and had a talk.

"What am I going to do?" he said, repeating the old man's question; "I am going to oppose it, tooth and nail. I have n't heard a word from Marsy since he left, nearly two years ago. I don't know whether he is dead or alive, nor where he is, if he is alive. In his absence, I can only do one thing, — resist. Who knows, Mr. Bradbury, what this deed amounts to? Both the subscribing witnesses are dead, — dead these thirty years. Who is going to prove their handwriting? And what weakness in such an instrument, under which no possession has ever been taken, and the document dated more than sixty years back! I think there is a very fair chance of defeating the claim entirely."

"Would you rather trust to a fight than compromise it?" suggested Luther.

"That would depend on the terms of compromise," answered Chalmers, reflecting. "I think the other side ought to be content with a comparatively small sum."

"But the deed is a cloud on the title."

"That is true."

"I don't know," said Uncle Luther, hesitatingly, "what Mr. Marsy's ability is to pay; but there is a friend of his, a person interested on both sides, who would, I think, like to do him a good turn by way of money, perhaps."

"Marsy is not very rich; I know that," was the reply. "But I don't know that he would be willing to accept such a favor."

"If it were a case," answered Luther, "as it is, where the person I mean is interested to see the Sisters benefited, perhaps it might be considered as much a favor to them as to him."

"I don't see," said Chalmers, "how I can raise any money for John, while he is away. It is very perplexing. I have telegraphed to London, to his address, but I get no reply. The amount of it is, that the farm ought to be kept somehow. Stanhope is perfectly right in advising the trustee that she has to assert her claim, and the only thing to do — but fight — is to give her a fair equivalent in money for it."

"And what papers should she execute?"

"Simply a quitclaim deed to Marsy."

"I think, Mr. Chalmers, the friend will insist on making the settlement."

"I can't stop him," he returned, laughing; "I don't even know who he is."

Luther bit his lip and took a short turn up and down the room. Short as it was, it gave him time enough to make up his mind. What the consequences

might be he could not foresee, and he foresaw, too, that they might be large; but there was only one course.

"The friend is a woman," he said, looking Chalmers in the face; "one of the Sisters, — Sister Frances, my niece."

Chalmers stared at Mr. Bradbury at first. But then a great deal of light came into his mind, an untold history unfolding itself. So that was the reason why John went away! He asked no questions, but simply said, at length: "Mr. Bradbury, in this state of things I feel as helpless as a child. I fancy your judgment would be better than mine." He fancied the old gentleman was the better posted of the two.

The result of the interview was that Mr. Bradbury made an appointment with Mr. Stanhope; and at that meeting there was some smart fencing. If Frances was going to buy anybody off, he was bound that it should not cost her a cent more than the purchase was worth. Mr. Stanhope forced him to admit that the deed was a serious cloud on Marsy's title. He further intimated that testimony was producible to verify the handwriting of the subscribing witnesses. Then there was the possibility of his being able to explain away the failure to take possession. No, on the whole, he was not afraid to go to trial. If he were to talk compromise, he should talk fifty per cent; and that was a minimum, and a fair offer, and no haggling would make it lower. He was sorry for Mr. Marsy, but the trustee had to do her duty. That was very true, Luther said;

it was merely a question of figures, and what would fifty per cent amount to in figures? That, as Mr. Stanhope truly said, depended on the valuation put on the roperty. And what was Mr. Stanhope's idea of the value? But Mr. Stanhope was hardly prepared to say; he would, however, examine and report to Mr. Bradbury at a future interview. Very good; but there was another point that had occurred to Mr. Bradbury, — whether there might not arise at some later day a legal question as to the trustee's power to make this compromise and settlement; and hence might not the validity of her quitclaim deed be called in question? and what was it worth additional to the trustee, to warrant the title as far as she and her successors were concerned, instead of merely quitclaiming? And Mr. Stanhope thought it was not an unreasonable suggestion, and considered perhaps that it would raise the amount of the compromise from fifty per cent to sixty-five, — which last proposition was acceptable to Luther; and the whole was reduced to writing as a sort of protocol for reference to Sister Ambrosia.

Pending the appraisal of the land, however, there came to light certain human motives and aspirations which threatened for a time to interrupt the proposed settlement. It would seem that the rector's eye had been mightily taken, months back, by the chaplaincy of the Sisterhood, rendered vacant by good old Mr. Farrington's demise. There was the sequestered parsonage, — an old, vine-grown, cosy habitation, down by

the Sound, the balustrade of its piazzas and its numerous trellises bright with roses in the summer-time. There was the clerical office, light in its duties, but mellowed with a certain unusual religiosity, in that its functions were performable under the shadow of the cloister. There, too, was an opportunity for quiet study and reading, for the pursuit of that culture that was the rector's chief mental grace. There were no distracting parish quarrels, no backbitings; his ministrations, outside the Sisterhood, were to an unorganized parish, — to the sick and afflicted of the countryside, whoever they might be. He could fancy himself snugly ensconced in this bright garden spot, with its view over the water and the fresh breeze fluttering the rosebush leaves at his elbow, with a pretty and talented young wife by his side, with his books about him, and the sombre tone of the convent bell just over the field, striking the hour; or he could see himself seated in the old chaise, jogging about the country, after the steady nag, past the trees, past the brooks and the quiet fields, on his various errands of mercy. It was a seductive picture to his ease-loving and grace-loving mind. There was an atmosphere, too, about the office, which had gathered there from the career of the incumbent who had passed away, — the reverend and benevolent Mr. Farrington; a man, too, of deep erudition and of graceful and searching diction with his pen, which had made its scratch respected and valued by the world outside of Marshton. Mr. Clerkenwell did not assert

to himself that he could continue the weaving of this benevolent and literary atmosphere about the old domicile; but it was at least a favorable air for one's ambition to dwell in.

To Sister Ambrosia, in whose hands lay the power of appointment, he had modestly mentioned the subject. She had listened, but had deferred the consideration of the matter. In Mr. Marsy's absence, she hesitated to make any appointment. For the crops of a good fraction of his farm went as a rent-charge to the support of the incumbent. Beside that, the parsonage so-called was a house of his own, for whose use he had simply forborne to collect any rent. There was an intimate relation here, which she did not like to invade. Old Mr. Farrington had been the original occupant of the office, for whom Mr. John Marsy and his father before him had felt a great respect and attachment. She decidedly wished that Mr. Marsy should have as much voice as she in the choice of a successor.

To the credit of Mr. Clerkenwell's judgment, it must be said that he had his doubts about Mr. Marsy's favoring his nomination. There was a lack of sympathy and liking between them which he could not help feeling; and he distrusted that if Sister Ambrosia awaited his return, he should ever get the place. When this mysterious deed turned up, however, and it seemed likely that the whole matter would now be lodged in the Sister's hands, his hopes took a great start. He even went so far as to suggest to her that it was unne-

cessary to wait longer. But the Superior was too disturbed in her mind by that very deed, to take any step in the matter at once. So the rector had to wait a little longer; but now there was confidence with the delay. Imagine his dismay, then, when he heard of this proposed purchase of the Sisterhood's claim for cash, with the estate again in Marsy's hands. But that was only a personal and interested feeling. There was another. It seemed to him very fitting that the House of Good-Will should have come to own a wider acreage, and on these fresh acres houses of considerable value. His churchly instinct caused him, as an ecclesiastic, to feel a keen twinge of disappointment over this proposed conversion of land into a composition sum of cash. A gloom had, to him, fallen over the former bright prospects of the House of Good-Will. He called upon Sister Ambrosia, and expressed his sentiments, and urged her to hold fast to her claim and reject this compromise.

Let who will, judge the rector. Let who will, say that if it had not been for his personal interest in the matter, he would have felt no interest at all. Our human motives are often mixed. Perhaps even the rector could not have told whether his were or not.

It is enough simply to say that he filled the Sister's mind with great doubts, much to her distress; and she came to Mr. Bradbury, in a very unbusiness-like way, to express her misgivings that the scheme could not, or should not, be carried out. Shrewd Luther, however,

cross-examined her, and the entire relation of the rector to the matter was brought out. Thereupon he quickly, perhaps too quickly, in too much heat, made up his mind, and assured her that the difficulty would be removed.

That same day he called upon Mr. Clerkenwell. He was at home and met Luther in his study. "Mr. Clerkenwell," said he, "I have called upon you on a matter of business. It is this matter of closing up the claim of the Sisterhood on Mr. Marsy's estate."

The rector slightly winced under his visitor's severe gaze in connection with this subject.

"I have been somewhat actively concerned in that matter, sir, by request of my niece. The proposed composition appears to me to be a very reasonable and just and fortunate arrangement for settling the affair, — just and reasonable to all parties except my niece. On her part it is a piece of magnificent generosity; whether you regard Mr. Marsy or the Sisterhood, sir, her behavior is admirable. It is the only issue, at all satisfactory, out of a distressing plight; and it is only satisfactory at all, because she is wholly pleased to do it, and will not be held back from doing it. Now, sir, it ill becomes you, in my opinion, to be meddling in this matter, and putting irrevelant and foolish, sentimental ideas into Sister Ambrosia's head. I see you start, sir. She did tell me; and I do not consider that I am abusing her confidence;" and Luther digressed from his errand a moment, to justify himself. "Too serious interests are

involved to permit me to stand by and see you defeat this arrangement, and hold my own tongue out of a mere delicate regard of repeating to you what I have heard from her. In fact, you had no reason to think that she would or could, in her place, keep your suggestions to herself. You put her in a wrong position, — in the first place, by needlessly distressing her; and in the second place, by giving her confidential advice which she would be virtually obliged to divulge. The only way I can relieve her is by coming to you as I do. Perhaps that is sufficient explanation."

"There was no need of your coming," said the rector.

"No need, sir? Do you think I am going to allow you to interrupt this scheme? What sort of spiritual advice is it that you give? That woman's heart and mind are large; and you try to make them small. You give her small ideas, and are glad to bring her down to your plane; you would suck out all the juice of human kindness, and leave a hollow thing inflated with the vanity of broad domains for the Sisterhood! Sheer vanity and selfishness! It is strange that you have no appreciation of the triviality of your conduct."

"You recollect that you are in my house, sir," said Clerkenwell.

"I recollect, sir, that I am in the rectory of St. Andrews' parish, and that you are in it too. And let me advise you," — and here the speaker's voice fell to a low pitch, — "let me advise you to entertain no hope

of leaving it for that parsonage down by the Sound. You are not fit for that place, Clerkenwell. You would do the work of that Sisterhood no good by your small ways and your small ideas. You have shown how you look upon a charitable institution of that kind. It has no meaning for you but a sentimental one. You would only clog its work. This is the place for you, sir."

Mr. Bradbury pulled out his handkerchief with a trembling hand and wiped his brow. The rector stood, still gripping tightly the back of the chair he had risen from. The attack had been so sudden and severe that he had no words at his command. Mr. Bradbury said, "I have made myself disagreeable, Clerkenwell; I could not mince this matter." He paused a moment. "Did it ever occur to you, Clerkenwell," he asked, "that you would like to leave the ministry? We mistake our callings sometimes; all of us are liable to do that."

The rector flushed.

"Mr. Bradbury," he answered deliberately, "you are cutting too deep. I do not resist your first speech. I am not wedded to my idea about Mr. Marsy's property. You have called me small and sentimental; and you have intimated that I am covetous. Perhaps I am; but I assure you, sir, I would not now, after what you have said, set one foot inside the parsonage. I am ready to go and tell Sister Ambrosia that I was wrong. I have no desire to be petty. I have my aspirations, sir. Perhaps my acts and words do not always conform to them, do not go so high. If that is so, it is my

misfortune. I have an ambition to live my life worthily. I — I can thank you, sir, for correcting me. You are older than I am, and have had much experience in the world. You are fit to judge my works, my acts, but not my ends, not my thoughts. I am willing to accept your reproof, severe as it was, in, I trust, a proper spirit."

Here the speaker paused, as if collecting himself. He continued with fervor: "There is one thing, however, in which I cannot be guided by you. My clerical office is something I revere. My membership of the ecclesiastic body as a clergyman is an elevation of me above the ordinary citizenship of the earth. My calling is my inspiration, as far as we have any. It is not a profession to me. It is a divine calling; it is an apostleship; it is a discipleship of Christ. I feel its dignity upon me. If I do not sustain that dignity, that is my misfortune, my sorrow. But I am far, sir, very far, I assure you, from casting it aside or ceasing my efforts to sustain it. In the matter of my vocation, Mr. Bradbury, I cannot allow you to be my judge."

"Clerkenwell," responded Luther, looking up after a few moments of silence, "I like what you say. You talk like a man; your language is hearty. I have touched bottom; I see that, Clerkenwell. Now, then, I have spoken to you harshly this afternoon, and I do not apologize for it, I don't take back one word. But now we are on other ground. If you believe in yourself, sir, if you feel a solid footing under you, and are

striking out from a foundation of self-respect in the ministry, why, go in and win. I have nothing against any man's self-respect and earnestness. I may criticise his performances. But that 's another thing; I 'll do and say what I think is right. But I admire a man that tries. That is the end of that. As to the other matter, the Sisterhood will get its money, and Marsy will keep the old place, and Frances — well, Frances will be out of pocket, that 's all. Now, don't be bitter; just live, and let live, and hang on to your dignity as a clergyman;" and Luther left the house with a load off his mind, but still somewhat excited.

This was a sore day in the rector's life. The little wind of the fancy, that had been speeding him toward that snug harbor of the Farrington parsonage, suddenly died out; and he was left for a time a becalmed craft, with drooping, idle sails. But ere a great while they filled again with a fresher breeze, and he went skimming on his way, on another and more approvable course. Luther's words lost their sting, but not their burden of counsel.

That same afternoon, Mrs. Salisbury had an interview with Sister Frances. It has been hinted how that Sister's name was, by the village public, already connected with that of Marsy, in that matter of the oyster business. Was it not a shocking thing that there was a sister in the convent who was in love, and who was so brazen as to flaunt it, by the chartering of the "Lucy" and all that, in the very face of the whole

town? But if they invented a relation with Mr. Marsy before, would they not now see one forged before their eyes, by this gift? There is time yet to stop this hubbub. Think, think, what you are doing, Sister Frances!

"My dear Mrs. Salisbury," responded the Sister, as that lady made some such objurgation as this to her in her room, "have I not thought about it? I am not ashamed of what I am doing. I like Mr. Marsy. I am not ashamed to be his friend. I will be friendly to him."

"Then you do not care what people say, nor what they think?"

"No!" answered Frances, with the fire of defiance in her face.

This was altogether a surprise. In a moment the critics of Marshton seemed to have dwindled wonderfully into mere motes. Mrs. Salisbury played with the fringe of her wrap, with downcast eyes and blushing face. "Are you in love?" she said, under her breath. Frances stopped before her.

"Is it necessary to be in love to do a friendly act?" she asked scornfully. "I do not know what you mean by love. I know I will not let Mr. Marsy be injured in his absence if I can help it. That need not be more than friendship, to my mind." After a few moments she said more gently, "Sisters do not fall in love."

"Do you think he will accept it?" asked Mrs. Salisbury, branching off to another aspect of the case.

"How in the world do I know?"

"But if he should n't, how awkward it would be!"

"Then you would have a person refrain from an act of friendship, for fear it might prove awkward for that person? That would be a poor friendship, — how horribly self-considerate!"

"But if you could wait till he came home?"

"When is he coming home?"

"I don't know."

"Nor I. In the mean time what is the ardent friend to do? Sit down and do nothing, for fear of being awkward? I fear you let what people will think rule you. How could it possibly be awkward between the two friends themselves, that one of them had had the temerity to be friendly? It is only when you bring in the public to look at the thing that you raise any idea of awkwardness. I am not to be frightened out of my performance by fear of being awkward."

"But women do not usually have such a friendship as you seem to show."

"Well, then, I will give them an example of one friendly woman who can be friendly, even to a man she knows. Mrs. Salisbury," she continued more seriously, "we are sometimes put in positions where it is hard to know what to do. That is trite, of course. But when one is in such a position, and there is a kind of maze about, where you can't see the ends of what you do, I think there is just one thing to do, — what *seems* right. If it proves to be a mistaken thing to do, one takes the

consequences of error; if not, then one has done right. When this matter came up, there was just one thing I could see to do; and I have done it, — or rather, I am going to do it. I am sure I could do nothing else."

CHAPTER XXVI.

MR. MARSY GOES TO CHURCH AND BUYS A NOSEGAY.

WHILE human life went its ordinary course in and about Marshton; while the wild roses bloomed along its roadsides; while the old mill ground away in spasms of exertion, stopping, as it were, only to catch its poor old breath; while the stir of trade gave life to the old grocery on the green; while the fields round about the village shimmered under the summer sun, and clinked with the peaceful sounds of farmers' tools; while the sunburnt oystermen patiently dredged for their oysters among the stakes, — there was yet another quarter of the earth where the sun shone over farm-lands, but only to make them flash with weapons of steel; where roses bloomed, — fields and fields of them, — but whose odor was borne away by the smell of gunpowder; where the fields of grain were swept for forage for invading cavalry; where the face of the warm earth not only quivered under the sun, but quivered in reality, and shook to the cannon's roar; where there were villages, too, but burned and sacked.

It was a strange contrast, the peace of the Connecticut village — disturbed only by miniature agitations,

like the oyster imbroglio and other such trivialities — with the storm of human passion that was whirling about over Bulgaria, with its lightning and thunder of war. Who that lived in the former, hearing none but peaceful sounds and the babble of village gossip, could have guessed the violence raging in that devoted eastern land?

No one in Marshton knew that John Marsy had been spending his two years of absence in the midst of that turbulence. Now in the dulness of camp life, now on the march, now wrapt in the clouds of battle, — present always, as a spectator, not as a combatant, — he moved among these active scenes, enjoying the rush and vigor of human energy that he saw about him, and finding a satisfaction in the mere fact of being present among these large and fierce movements of humankind. When he finally left the place, upon the restoration of peace, it was as a man who had grown in gravity, self-reliance, and calm. When he returned to peaceful people, it seemed as if he could see over their heads, could regard the world with more poise. To have seen so much rupturing of human affairs, — with his mind, more than his feelings, engaged, — seemed to have imparted to him a sort of sublimity of view, which made all minor human difficulties appear more easy to be endured and more to be expected.

Moving westward, he first came to a halt in Milan. The rest and peace were grateful to him; and he abode there, enjoying the sight of the people pursuing

the ordinary avocations of civilized life. The sense of security that he saw was novel, after the two years of riot and violence; and it was a pleasure to him simply to watch the light-heartedness of those who lived in a land where there was peace. He liked nothing better than to stroll along the Corso of Victor Emanuel of an afternoon; when the Milanese were out promenading, — thronging the sidewalks and stopping to exchange genial salutations. In perfect physical health, he would walk along whiffing his cigar, content to be lost as a stranger in this stream of happy humanity. It was no cause of irritation when those in front of him stopped to speak with friends and blocked the way. Nothing could disturb the serenity that was upon him in that season of reaction. Sometimes they would stare at him as he passed, studying the bronzed face and the two long scars that crossed each other from his cheek to his neck. But perhaps the stare was no more than they would have given to any stranger.

As the days went on, the novelty of seeing a peaceful community wore away. His thoughts strayed off to other things and other places. He began to think of Marshton, of Aleck Graham, and his last days there. He found his mind dwelling upon that time. The face of the woman who had figured in those scenes came before him, and he longed to see it again. He fell to thinking what he should do next. Should he go home — for a while? For what? He did not answer that question. He only felt an inclination to

stand before her again, face to face. Would she turn him away?

One day he was out as usual for his stroll on the Corso. There was the same gay crowd there that was to be seen every pleasant day. The sun was low; and its golden light, flooding the street, softened and enriched the color of the buildings; they seemed to become of gold themselves. The promenaders were joyous and nonchalant. The occupants of the carriages passed, with freedom from care on their faces. Everybody seemed to be content; all to have found their natural places and to be at rest. Marsy felt lonesome in such surroundings. There was something stifled in him that could find nothing answering to it in this holiday throng.

When he came opposite the great cathedral he crossed the street and went in by a side door, — a neglected door, apparently, for the time being, for the crowd outside went on its way, laughing and talking; only an old woman with a hand extended for alms stood on the threshold. Inside, he was in another world. The groins of the lofty arches were patched with light from the setting sun. Below, about the floor, the church was dim, except in one transept, where vespers were being said and there were lights. Elsewhere human beings were creeping about like insects over the vast floor; the outlines of the solemn pillars were faint in the gathering dusk; near at hand a kneeling sinner was being absolved at the confessional. He stood still. The

silence and distance were so different from the noisy babble of the street. At length the murmur of the priest's voice stopped. Then the organ sounded; and ere it had ceased, there came the deep rumble of the bells from the roof, crowning the praise below with a mysterious grandeur. At that moment he felt himself before the greatness of the spiritual world; and tears were in his eyes. At length the dispersing congregation aroused him; and he went out with the rest, by the large door, to the head of the broad staircase, to the daylight. The *piazza* was spread before him. He descended the stairs, and turning to the right, entered the Corso.

The careless, joy-loving crowd had left the street. He strolled slowly along the nearly empty thoroughfare, until he came, at length, to a brilliantly lighted café. Here he turned in, and joined the Italian life that was gathered under the glare. The tables were well filled. He sat down at one, and watched the faces around him. The Milanese were a handsome set, old and young, — faces that one could look at with pleasure. He watched an amused neighbor, who was smiling quietly, absorbed in the "Figaro." Erelong a flower-girl came with her bouquets. Her hair was cocked up in a rakish fashion, evidently to attract; and her hat, trimmed in excellent taste, was set jauntily on her head. Would Monsieur not have this bouquet? Did he see how fresh these flowers were? How much is it, then? Oh, Monsieur was so good! Many, many thanks. Would

Monsieur accept this little buttonhole gift in addition? So. Adieu! In a dreamy way Marsy noted her tour of the café.

He sat a long time at his table, sipping the coffee and brandy, and smoking one cigar after another. The old scenes in Marshton were passing before his mind and filling him with much thought. The roses in the bouquet reminded him of the wild roses at home.

Finally, he left the place and went home to bed. It was a night of disturbing dreams. The woman who had been at the confessional came driving along the Corso in a splendid carriage. He was astonished; she had looked, in the church, to be poorly clad. The handsome man who had been reading the "Figaro" was singing a solo in the cathedral, and Marsy stood beside him in the loft; it seemed as if the voice did not penetrate an inch into the vastness before them; on the contrary, there was a current of air coming against them, that slowly lifted them both up out of the church and overland, somewhere. It was in the eastern land of roses; there the flower-woman was, gathering the identical nosegay he had bought of her that evening. She saluted him with all her grace and assurance; but just at that moment, when he was thinking he had found out where she came from, there was a report of a rifle, and she was stretched dead at his feet, — no longer the vender of roses, but a stalwart, Bulgarian peasant-woman. The nosegay was on the ground; the blood

oozed from a wound in her breast; and he saw now, that, close to her other side, she clasped an infant in her stiffened embrace. There was a clatter of horse's hoofs behind him. He turned and saw Circassians galloping down. The foremost had his yataghan drawn, and his eyes were fixed on the babe. In another moment he would have slashed it; but the cutlass fell on the dreamer's own neck, and his bullet emptied the saddle. Now he was in for it; dead mother and living babe behind him, the murderers all around! "Aleck! Aleck!" he called; "help me!" But there was no Aleck, and his revolver was emptied. In the next vision he was under a tent, with Sister Frances nursing him. The tent was pitched in the convent yard at Marshton. Mr. Bradbury was there, holding the wondering, black-eyed, Bulgarian infant. The dreamer tried to turn his head to look, but he could not; his neck was stiff. Frances then picked up the nosegay from the ground; but it was made, now, of the wild roses that grew on the old road at Marshton. Then there came the tone of a bell from the convent. But it was not the familiar tone. The deep bells of the cathedral had somehow been transferred there. He listened and listened; they would never cease their rumbling. At last he opened his eyes. It was broad daylight. The heavy bells were really rumbling. It was almost ten o'clock.

That forenoon he went to his banker's. A pile of letters that had been storing up for him in London for some months past came to his hand Among them was

one from Chalmers. It detailed the discovery of the ancient deed, and the purchase of it for his account by Sister Frances, — formerly Mrs. Hiller, — which circumstance he presumed Marsy would understand better than he did; and advised him to return home.

CHAPTER XXVII.

HEARTS ARE TRUMPS.

THAT good clergyman Mr. Farrington, — but dimly seen in the foregoing pages, a figure standing in the distance, who has not nearly concerned us, — can still less concern us now. From the flower-grown parsonage of low-studded rooms by the Sound, — from there his heart had been warm toward his fellow-man, — toward every neighbor and every distant human spirit; from there he went forth on his errands of mercy, with wise words of counsel and of comfort; and there, at last, after upwards of forty years of ministration, — to neighbors by deed and voice, and to the world by touch of pen, — the good old man's breath became still, and his form was seen no more.

How our less dignified clerical friend, Mr. Clerkenwell, aspired to fill his vacancy, and how his aspirations were checked by the interposition of Luther Bradbury, we have seen; but that is neither here nor there. It is with the relict, Mrs. Farrington, that we are concerned at present.

She is hale, with the softly blooming haleness of extreme old age, — past eighty; with a majestic figure, —

slightly bent, but majestic still; with a weaving, rheumatic gait, which somehow does not strike one as ungraceful in this venerable form; sitting, indeed, more than walking, — a kind of queen in her wide, straight-backed arm-chair, — it might be a throne of gold as far as fitness went; a heavy, imposing brow; eyes of blue, sunken somewhat, and their softness rendered still more soft and inaccessible by a slight dimness, — the crown, rather than the imperfection, of age. With her white silken locks stretched away from the high forehead, — as delicately rosy as a new-born infant's, — with her crisp, white cap-strings knotted under her chin and falling straight and uncrumpled down her breast; sitting tranquil and serene, — no matter how casual the particular pose, no matter how unpregnant the moment, she seemed always to be sitting in state; as if she were benignantly giving an audience, with a retinue of invisible angels about her. Scarcely would one have dared to approach, except it were to perform some service for this queen.

Queen, indeed, in guise; but how little queen in her own thought! As uncommanding in her own esteem as a little child; one who would venture only timidly, it seemed, to present to you the thought that was in her mind, — a suggestion scarcely worth your heed, yet uttered because, possibly, it was fitting to the moment to your own need, and if unuttered there might be a vacancy, a possible unused opportunity for assisting you. Estimable mind! that had read the world, and the

meaning of its life. Venerable mind! that saw not only the errors of youthfulness, but those too of middle age; that discerned misapprehensions, errors of judgment, whence might come ill. Strong mind! that had come in its maturity to an unerring recognition of the strong and useful, of the ultimately right, though it might be that which was momentarily painful and, unrelated to ethics, merely against one's habit. Broad mind! that now, standing as it were on the last peak of human experience, having read and studied and pondered and discriminated its way slowly along, with an eye ever open to truth, had stored, in its eighty years, a rare sum of wisdom.

Her waning physical powers were accompanied by no mental decay. New books and new ideas, new schools of thought, interested her. Although she had been the devoted wife of a clergyman, she had long lived above the plane of ecclesiastical demarcations. The freshly discovered truths of science all came to her hand for use; they were the blocks to go into the pyramid of her philosophy, that stretched from earth to heaven, from inorganic matter to the spirit, from the dullest to the keenest activity of God; between the two extremes, nothing came amiss that was true.

Nor was there any slackening of interest in the persons about her. The mental life of each was looked at with a penetrating and yet with a tolerant eye. She soon set a value on her acquaintances according to their worth; and she was by no means so foolish as to think

them all equally worthy. But strong or weak, simple or complex, they were all her children; she seemed to be able to transfer herself to the standpoint of every character, as if every sort of experience seemed to have been lived or already imagined by her. Her mild but trenchant words were like rain-drops hitting flowers in their fall; coming swiftly and surely to their destination, but to refresh and not to spoil.

A year since she had come to take up her residence at the convent. How else should the parsonage be empty, for Mr. Clerkenwell to reach after? But whether in the cottage or in the convent, her appearance and her character were the same. Only, perhaps, now she took even more interest in the Sisters, — being surrounded by them in her daily life, — and went deeper into their characters. Mrs. Farrington was not long in discerning the unsettled condition of young Sister Frances' mind; and those interesting reports, too, could not have failed to reach her ears, concerning the absence of Mr. Marsy, and the Baileys, and the affair of marketing the oysters. She felt like helping her young friend, if her longer life and greater experience could be a source of help; and it must be confessed that in this regal old lady's soothing presence and extreme good sense Frances did find more repose than she had found with any human being for many a day; and when the news of the disposition of that troublesome deed of old Edward Marsy came out, and Mrs. Farrington warmly commended the Sister for her action,

a bond of understanding seemed to be finally formed between these two.

They were sitting together one day, in the elder's room, — a room whose whitewashed nakedness had been covered with wall-paper for the old lady's sake, and where various articles of furniture that had long been familiar to the eye of visitors at the parsonage were gathered. This room Sister Frances sometimes found an agreeable change from her own ungarnished quarters; especially in her seasons of rebellion, when she thought much about the interference of Mr. Clerkenwell and his criticisms upon her spiritual life.

They had been talking of the affairs of the House of Good-Will; and Mrs. Farrington was led, at last, to give to Sister Frances some reminiscences of the first superioress, Marie Delacroix, whom the old lady had known intimately in the Sister's latter years. "You know the story of her escapade," she said to Frances; "how she ran away from her home to marry Phil Marsy, and coming to the meeting-place was met by a messenger in his stead, who told her of his death?"

"Yes, I have heard that," said Frances.

"I have often thought," continued the old lady, in a moment of confidence, "what she would have done as to this unfortunate deed, if she had been in good Sister Ambrosia's place. I do not know that she was better than Sister Ambrosia, perhaps not so good; but she was very decided and quick in her action. I fancy she would have torn it up and burned it on the spot; and if she

had been confronted with a breach of legal obligation, she would have answered with a defiant eye that she knew what was right and was ready to take any consequences. A very direct woman who cut through all forms, at a stroke, to the quick! In fact, in her day, there was but little of the sacerdotal or cloistered element about this charity. She had loved her lover with all her soul, and incurred the displeasure of her family and even a separation from them for the sake of it; and when Philip Marsy's father, from his attachment to his son,— for he loved that 'scapegrace,' as he was called, — and from his love for the woman who had given up so much for him, gave her this property and treated her as his own daughter, there was too much of the actively human in the affair for Marie ever to lose herself in religious poetry; there was only that impulsive devotion to helping people, that personal feeling of helping them with their troubles. Many a word has come to me from the people hereabouts, most of them dead and gone now, of her 'queer ways' as they called them; but 'she was a blessed woman,' they would add reverently. Oh, no! she was stanch for the Marsys; she thought everything of them. If this deed had been discovered in her lifetime, she would have gone to prison before she would have taken it. In fact, my dear," and Mrs Farrington lowered her voice, though there was no one to hear, "my own belief is that she did reject that very document in her lifetime, and instead of being destroyed, it was somehow, perhaps by

some wish of Edward Marsy, preserved, and then unfortunately mislaid. Sister Marie died suddenly, or I fancy this misfortune might have been averted. I am sure, with her regard for her lover's brother and for all that pertained to the family, she would not have taken the last acre of land from him; and from John! A wee, toddling thing he was, when she died; and she used to make a great deal of him, playing with him and pushing back his curls from his cheeks, — why, I think it would have broken her heart once more, to think of the child being hurt."

The old lady paused. Her companion was gazing far away out of the window.

Presently she continued: "You must not think, Frances, that I am passing a hostile judgment on the Sisterhood and its management. At the sources, you know, all these things are personal; they take their rise out of some human emotion, and have the coloring of some particular human heart about them. But as they grow old, and pass on, away from their sources, they lose their original individuality and fall at last into some general type; they reflect, not one mind, but a mixture of several minds of the same general tone; they drift into forms and sustain rigid relations. This institution, now, is not simply representative of Marie Delacroix's heart; it is an established charity, and its head feels a relation to the law which it dreads to break; it is fixed. Such rigidity, such possible friction between impulse and blind immovable requirement,

seems to be a kind of evil, — perhaps unavoidable, but a waste, a destruction of force, a restriction on the keenness of our hearts, on the energy of our lives."

Again she paused, and Frances asked: "Do you think that we ought always to yield to that friction, to let it wear us dull, — to let some fixity — that is, perhaps, of shadowy, ill-understood warrant, but that has come about us and touched us — stop our progress, to get in the way of the swiftness of one's life? — I don't know that I can say just what I mean, but something that keeps you from full inhalations in your spiritual life, that prevents what you might call a spiritual glow?"

"I know," said the elder, nodding; "I know what you mean. Life, the inner current of life, comes in contact with obstructions; shall we leap over them, or abide submissively inside? It is a very deep question. It can hardly be answered generally. Force, human force, that surplus of energy that impels one to a course in the face of all obstacles, — it has been the root of much of the good and right that has been done in the world; it has overturned worn-out institutions. The honest nature that could not stand the artificial thing has broken through it. All impulse cannot be bad, though it may not be able to see clearly ahead; and yet we may have bad impulses and weak visions, and either will lead us into error."

"Should one not consider," asked Frances, "the possibility of losing one's own self-respect, by a self-

loving rebellion against the fixed? Is one not more respectable to stand and endure?"

"That is indeed a thing to be considered," answered the other; "but on the other hand one must consider the possibility of a life run — even if not wholly, yet more or less — to waste."

"It depends, no doubt, as you say, on the particular case," said Frances, again gazing out of the window.

After a few moments of silence she came and stood before Mrs. Farrington. Her face paled and flushed by turns. "I have made a vow," she said, only half articulately; "shall I keep it, or shall I not?"

She seemed by her tone to be addressing the question to herself, though her eyes were fixed on her companion.

"Come here, my dear," answered Mrs. Farrington, soothingly; "draw your chair beside me, and let me take your hand."

Frances did as she was bid; but her hand trembled in the old lady's large, soft palm.

"Tell me your vow."

"No one knows it but God," said the Sister, in a low voice; and after a moment she added: "It was never spoken aloud, only whispered to myself; but it was in my heart."

"Frances," said the other, "you must not be excited over questions of duty. We cannot always do perfectly; we must do calmly, the best we can. It is an

imperfect knowledge that we possess. But, as in other things, we cannot mend matters by being flurried. Now, you have honestly made a vow. No doubt you have questioned yourself so much whether you shall keep it, that you have become morbidly sensitive to the fear of error. Perhaps I can help you."

"Perhaps you can," answered the Sister, looking up despairingly into Mrs. Farrington's face. But the majesty of age in that face, as she looked, seemed to inspire her with a faith, after all, in human worth; with a feeling that, however prone to error, our honest attempts are respectable and valued somewhere. Plodding, moral plodding, seemed hopeful; and she added with a brighter look, "I almost believe you can."

After a few moments she went on: "When I joined this Sisterhood, I consecrated myself to this work — as long as I lived."

"What is its work?" quickly asked the old lady.

"To live apart from the world and do good," answered Frances, mechanically, as if she were reciting her catechism.

"And which do you find it difficult to do?"

"To live apart from the world," answered Frances, looking up with a sad smile into the old lady's face; she felt in her heart that her confessor knew what she meant.

It was a benignant face, however, that she looked up into, and one that had an answering smile — for a moment.

"Do you see anything unworthy in your *not* living apart from the world, as you put it?"

"Nothing," she answered emphatically, her eyes gleaming in the vehemence of her negation. She was quiet a moment. Then she suddenly said, "I have never said anything, I have never thought so plainly, before. Now, the last two or three years seem to me — hard." She gave one appealing look into the old lady's face, and then her head fell on her knees.

Mrs. Farrington stroked the gold-brown head caressingly, but with a nervous touch. Not until the outbreak had passed away did she speak. Then, as Frances rose, she said: "What I am going to say, my dear, has nothing to do with any pity I may have for you in your tears. I should have said it any way. Man's rules and man's forms are man's work, not God's. Be you God's handiwork. If the spiritual life He has given you will thrive best in the atmosphere that He has breathed on all the world at large, live in that. A noble-hearted woman, a noble-hearted man, living truly, is never a dispraise of God. You keep your vow of consecration to Him when you live so that your soul exists in its keenest responsiveness to the Great Final Spirit."

The old lady was silent. Frances rested her head on her hand in thought, her agitation gradually subsiding. At length there came a knock on the door. Sister Ambrosia entered, and the younger Sister passed out.

She could not go to her own room. Those last words of Mrs. Farrington were too pregnant, too far-reaching, to be thought over in her own narrow chamber; they seemed to her to push her out-of-doors into the broad free air, where they themselves belonged. It was yet hardly noon, and she wandered out of the convent yard into the meadow. The sun was bright. Clover blossoms and daisies were at her feet, the myriad singing of a July field in her ears. All at once her heart seemed to grow light. Form and rubric passed away. The convent was but a shell. The heart of Marie Delacroix was its life; with that she had to deal, — not with the accoutrement, the *exuviæ*, that the dead founder had left behind. And at this moment Marie's heart was not in the convent, it was in this bright field; it *was* this field. That warm heart and its heart were one; and hers, Frances' heart, was one with them too. For a moment, life was broad and great.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

UNCLE LUTHER IS SURPRISED, BUT GLAD.

When the crustacean sheds his shell, Nature has provided him with a covert growth of a new one, which, all unseen by our eye, is fastening itself upon him in preparation for his new term of life. In some such way — we may imagine — it was that Sister Frances came to be wearing upon her feet, not the clumsy calf-skin shoes of the convent, but the neatest kind of a kid and morocco affair, with a rather high heel and a resplendent large silver buckle, — unseen by human eye other than her own, for the convent dress readily covered it; also, unseen by other human eye, certain stockings of very pronounced hue and pattern in place of others usually worn by the Sisters, — whose color it would be out of the way to refer to, being worn by Sisters; also, hidden by a scarf, there were, on occasions, large diamonds in her ears; furthermore, — the fact is mentioned with face averted, — a certain diamond button came to repose upon her breast, uniting the edges of a garment that was most decidedly hidden under her dress. How these things were purloined from her own stock at Uncle Luther's, — the remnant

of what had gone for board in New York, — with a fluttering heart and nervous fingers (she was so fearful that some one would catch her in her weakness) ; and how she carried herself most unconcernedly out of the house with the package under her arm, as if she were the most innocent person in the world, and lavished them upon herself in her room in the convent, and disported herself among her fellow-Sisters with those unhallowed things upon her person, — that was a shameless piece of conduct, which there shall be here no attempt to extenuate. To be sure, the reason of it is easily discovered. How the restraint made her will run riot; how her enforced separation from the world, — that is, from Mr. Marsy (he was still abroad), and her impatience at his not coming, and, most of all, her diffidence whether he would ever take the trouble to come at all, — how all these things made her resent even the garb-forms of a conventual existence, so that she cheated it by these clandestine indulgences, taking upon herself even extravagant forms of worldly habiliment, — how, in short, her social misplacement made her abandonedly wilful, — this it is not hard to understand. It was quite human nature.

In the midst of this headstrong rebellion, as she was engaged one day in her room in going over the marks of the school-children (the term having just closed for the summer), a tap came on her door, and the little maid who assisted about the house handed her a card bearing the inscription, " Mr. John Marsy."

"What is this?" demanded the Sister, in almost a a fierce tone; she had a notion that some one must be trifling with her.

"The gentleman is below, ma'am, in the parlor," courtesied the little maid.

The color left Sister Frances' face. She was dumb: and well she might be, for she saw nothing, not even the card in her hand. The room seemed to have become suddenly dark and formless. The girl waited a few moments, while the Sister held the card with her eyes bent on it; then she said, "Shall I tell him you will see him, ma'am?"

Frances looked up. "Yes," she said; and the little maid left the chamber.

The Sister tossed the card carelessly on the bureau, and went to the window with an indifferent air, and looked out and pouted. After a minute or two she went out of the room, without so much as looking in the glass, and sauntered with almost a contemptuous gait down the hall. She entered the parlor, and stood there, just before the door, as if she were a great lady granting an audience by the wayside to a beggar. The visitor was at the farther corner of the room. He came forward courteously, and while she stood erect with a wholly undisturbed face, he took her hand. She suffered him to hold it for upwards of a half-minute. Then she said, quite calmly, "Won't you be seated?" At the same time she dropped into a chair, and sat there as if she were somewhat bored.

He took a seat at a respectful distance. His manner was quite as unagitated as hers. After a few moments of silence he said, "It seems you are capable of being a man's friend."

"What do you mean?" she inquired in a languid tone.

"It is necessary to explain, then?" he returned.

"As you choose," she answered indifferently.

"Your memory is very bad," he replied, slightly irritated. "Perhaps you do so many good turns that they are simply a mass to you; you can't particularize them after they are done."

"It pleases you to be sarcastic," she remarked wearily.

"Yes, as long as straightforwardness does not seem to reach you."

"Am I so remote from you, then? A few months seems to make a great difference," she answered, with sarcasm in her own tone.

"The time seems to have passed very quickly with you, I should judge," he said again, coldly.

"Time does pass quickly. Life is short," she returned, with more genuineness in her voice; "we should make the best use of it," she added after a moment.

"Now you are preaching," he said with a slight sneer, eying unconsciously her black, plain dress.

She answered him only with a contemptuous look, turning her face aside.

Marsy had not expected a reception of this kind. When he called he knew not, indeed, what was before him. But he had unconsciously looked for at least kindness. Now she treated him as if he were a puppy. His mind ran back over the last two years. He thought of where he had been, what sort of a life he had led on her account. The great scars on his neck and cheek burned as he quickly turned it over in his mind. "For you!" he muttered to himself in inward contempt,— "for you, who do your good deeds coldly, only because they are good, and not for friendship's sake! I come back here with my heart full; I could fall on your neck and kiss you for your act, — and find you a lump of ice! Another name to the long list of worthless women!" For a moment, barely a moment, his eyes moistened. He arose suddenly, very suddenly, with his eyes now glowing like fire, and, snapping his fingers in the air, he cried, — and yet in a subdued voice, a hiss almost,— "That, for your gift! That, for your goodness!" and he stood before her with his hat in his hand, half menacingly, and half as if he would have left the room without further word.

Frances arose, too, but quite calmly. "Where did you get those scars?" she asked.

"What are the scars to you?" he returned, still glaring at her.

"They are rather becoming," she answered quietly, and smiled at him.

She continued smiling at him as he stood before

her; a broadening smile, while a look of wicked pleasure crept into her eyes. He studied her curiously. Finally she dropped into her seat again, with the same weary air, and said, "Oh, dear! why do you keep me standing so?"

"Have you been making fun of me?" he asked, evidently not sure of his ground.

"Oh, you are such a goose!" she returned, with perfect nonchalance, as she turned her gaze languidly out of the window.

"What trick are you playing me now?" he asked, still half-vexed.

"Why, you should know," she answered, "that it is rather embarrassing to be confronted with a reminder of a deed that you regret."

"Do you regret it?" he quickly asked.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because it made me rather — made me act."

"Can I relieve you from your act?"

"No," she answered, with a rising inflection; "that is past and gone."

"The remedy is not gone."

She did not reply.

There were some moments of silence. Her air of indifference seemed so real that he could scarcely believe it was assumed.

"Mrs. Hiller," he began; but she gave him such a reprimand with her eyes that he stammered as he

collected himself and addressed her as Sister Frances; then her eyes resumed their weary look, and he went on: "Sister Frances, will you tell me whether you have any friendship for me, or not?"

"For *you*, Mr. Marsy? Are you not egotistical to ask that question of a Sister? A Sister has friendship for all the world; why for Mr. Marsy in particular?"

He was silent. These words were too hard. He turned his head away, and did not speak; nor did she. But at last he lifted his face and said, begging, "Frances?" His utterly lugubrious face made her break into a laugh. "Frances!" he said, more eagerly, as he walked over to her and looked into her eyes. She returned his gaze with a mischievous one of her own. He glanced aside a moment, at her foot that peeped out from under her dress as she sat in her languid attitude. "That is rather a worldly shoe," he remarked.

"Do you like it?" she asked, holding the foot up from the floor, and regarding it and the ankle.

"Yes, I do," he answered, looking at it. Then he raised his eyes. Her chest was heaving a little, as she answered his gaze this time. The foot was dropped; and she arose, evading him as she did so, and went to the window. He followed her. She stood with her back to him, and would not turn round. He imagined that the scarf was in his way. It would not be quite so bad to have the back of a head and of a neck toward you, if they were bare. He nipped the fabric gently and pulled it back. It yielded,—and its owner did

not resist. She only coughed slightly; something seemed to have caught in her throat. Presently the scarf was hanging back, so that the whole bright head of hair appeared. He passed his hand over it. He thought he heard a slight panting against the window-pane; and pulled the scarf down until the diamonds in the ears appeared, and her neck was bare. It did not try to escape. He lowered his head and kissed it, more than once. She turned round and confronted him. He had never seen just that face before. It was flushed, but grave as silence; and the blue eyes were melting. The combative contour seemed to invite an attack which it might return; the wimple, hanging down, left her crown of wavy hair smartly brushed from her temples; and her neck was a fitting stem to this sturdy, bright-colored flower perched upon it, that seemed almost to bend slightly forward, as if wavering in its poise, to be plucked. He regarded the face, while his breath and hers came quickly. But — her glance went past him, and fell upon the crucifix above the mantel-piece. Her eyes swept the room, with its bare walls and plain garniture. It represented all her forswearing of the world. This was not a place for lovers, — scarcely even for friends.

"No!" she whispered, and turned and went out of the room, going toward the front door of the building.

He followed, and passed her and opened the door. But as he held it, he suddenly faced her and commanded, "Stop!"

She obeyed him.

"If I am not to see you again," he said, as his eyes closely scanned her face, "if you are going out of this door ever to enter it again, I wish to say good-by, here and now."

His look was hard; but she stood before him in such a humble way and with such a docile look on her own face that his manner relaxed, and a softer look came into his eyes.

"I do not want to be hard," he resumed; "I think of you. I do not want you to be hurt, to be stirred, by my harshness. You are dear to me. I don't want you, Frances, to do anything to lose your self-respect. Remember what you told me two years ago. You were in earnest then; you were acting then, as you thought, truly to yourself. Will you please act so now, for my sake?"

There was a tenderness in his tone, as there was in his thought, that touched her heart very deeply. That the man she loved should think first of all of her! She trembled as she stood before him, and the soft, grave look in her face was reinforced by some broad underlying expression of repose. But no words would come to her lips. Only, as she stood there, more and more love seemed to come into her eyes.

"Is there any answer?" he asked.

"Only one," she replied readily, standing immovable, with her solemn eyes fixed fast on his.

It was cruelty to keep her so. He put out his arms to take her, and her head fell on his breast; but he

turned it up so that the face, the eyes, and the lips, all were his.

Ah! there had been kissings of meetings and kissings of partings many a time in that old doorway. Tears and smiles had been there. Places had been filled there; and on that spot household places had become forever vacant. But kisses and tears and smiles of betrothal, — had they ever been born just there? Had any couple of young hearts ever come together on the threshold of the old house? How the embittered goblins must have gambolled and capered about at the sight of such a thing in their old home!

But it made — this desecration of the convent — it made Frances solemn as she left its portal, and she looked up and scanned the front of the building as if it might have been some old friend to whom she had done harm. Then she turned and looked up at Marsy sorrowfully. She seemed to have forgotten the religiously dishevelled condition of her head, with the hood and scarf both gone, and with brilliants in her ears; and the innocent, piteous expression on her face made him laugh.

"We are going off unseen!" she said, in something like consternation. "I don't want to run away; I want to go out deliberately, and have people know it."

"Well, shall we wait here till some one comes?" he asked. "You are a trifle rakish-looking, with that sagging scarf, and those silver buckles cropping out from your nun's dress; rather incongruous, — desperate,

you might say; a stiletto, perhaps, sticking somewhere around the folds of your dress. You look as if you were n't afraid of the whole world."

"I am not!" she rejoined. "I have a serene conscience."

"Where are you going?" he inquired.

"I am going to the convent gate."

"And where then?"

"To stop and rest and think." Her face was grave. "You did not forget me; did you?" she asked, looking up at him. Then she was silent. There was a pleased look on her face, like that on the face of a child when it has some pleasant satisfaction of soul that shines out through its features. At that moment her worldly trappings of attire seemed all to have faded away and left her to go forth from the convent with the ingenuousness and simple pleasure of a child.

They went on their way, down the avenue of cedars. These sentinels stood erect as always; with eyes neither to right nor left, as the couple marched slowly on between them. The shadows of the one line of them fell across the driveway, — the lovers stepping changefully from light to shadow, and shadow to light, as they walked. It was a still afternoon. There was no sound of life in the convent yard, not even the thwack of the gardener's spade. Not a cedar filliped a spray. They soon were out of the gate, — the double gate with its arabesque curves (which somehow or other did not clack its jaws together against them), — and came to a

halt upon a sequestered mossy bench by the wall, much whittled by idle boys in the many years it had stood there; being a convenient stopping-place for them as they were chestnutting. Here in the shade, peace seemed to come upon the couple. They sat a long time in silence, as if the spiritual goal had been reached, and it was now time to rest and be at ease.

The afternoon shadows moved slowly on across the bench. After a while she asked, "Why did you let me tease you so, when we were in the parlor?"

"I did not know whether you were teasing or in earnest."

"You were very angry."

"I know it."

"Why did n't you go away and leave me?"

"I don't know whether I could have done it or not, — out of anger."

"I am sorry, dear, I hurt you." Her eyes were sad, even moist; but she added immediately, "Don't you know women like to do such things? I dare say I may do it again. But, this time, I don't know whether I knew what I was doing; a woman has to do something to be calm."

Just then Sister Ambrosia and Sister Cecilia appeared, coming up the road.

Frances bit her lip.

The Superior and her associate were indeed approaching, trudging along the grass by the roadside. As they came near, Frances arose and went, bare-

headed as she was, and met them. Her face was pale, but her voice was quite firm, as she addressed the head Sister. "Sister Ambrosia —" but there she halted; for the Sister saw Marsy by the bench, and noticed the absence of the scarf. A troubled look came on her face, and she glanced nervously from him to Frances. But she went forward to him and greeted him, and said that she was glad he had returned. She paused a moment. There was much more on her mind to say to him. But she seemed to decide to defer further talk; for she returned to Frances, with the nervousness still in her manner.

"I am going to leave you, Sister," said the younger. "I have left you."

The Superior made no utterance.

"I have left the House of Good-Will — finally," said Frances.

"And broken your vow?" quoth Sister Cecilia, with snapping eyes.

"Hush, child!" said Sister Ambrosia, softly; "hush!"

"I have broken my vow," acknowledged Frances.

"Dear child," said the Superior, taking up the first idea that came to her in her excitement, "why did you not wait another year? Then you might have gone in peace."

"No, Sister," returned Frances; "I made my consecration for my life, and I have broken it, and the lesser vow with it."

The two, the Superior and Frances, stood facing

each other. With the latter, there was naught but acknowledgment; with the former there were mingled pity, sorrow, and incertitude. Should she try to call back this wanderer? Ah! the problems that were bound to come across the Superior's life! Why was she so often called upon to bear their solution? Could she, though, ever rest in peace, if she should let her young associate go without one word of recall? There was little time to think. "Sister," she said, "will you not go back with me?"

"No," said Frances.

"Do you reflect on what you are doing? — on the invasion of sobriety of conduct, on the reflection you cast, either on your order and all holy living, or else on yourself?"

"I have thought of it all, Sister; I can not go back."

"You *can* not? Do you wish to?"

"No."

"Oh, Frances, I do not believe you are light-hearted in doing this; I think you must be deep-hearted." The words seemed to be wrung from the Superior's heart, as if she could not bear to believe anything unworthy of the young Sister she loved. "You have some deep motive, some worthy urgency, have n't you?" she asked, with her face piteously expressing a wish for the answer "Yes."

"I believe I have," answered Frances.

The Superior was silent a few moments. She knew not what to say. This was not the time for the long,

quiet talk that she wanted; and yet she could not go away at once. It seemed so hard to go away bearing this thing as a fact, without further words. In her despair, she said, but as if she scarcely knew what she was saying, "You will come and see us, Frances?"

"No, Sister Ambrosia," she answered; "I can not. But I shall want to see you, and I shall see you; but at my house, not yours."

There was something about the notion of Frances being hostess to her, the veteran, that touched the Superior's heart, and at last started free the emotion that had been pent up through this interview. She put her arms round her young friend's neck, and kissed her again and again; and when she finally ceased, the tears were running down her cheeks. "Yes, we shall be friends," she murmured; and wringing Frances' hand in a parting clasp, she hurried away, drawing Sister Cecilia with her.

Frances stood in the road, motionless, watching the departing Sisters. Her mind, as her gaze, was on those black dresses, the outward mark of the life she was leaving. She thought of herself, with her hood gone and her head bare, — wavy head it was with the gold streaks gleaming in the sun; a sense of dishevelment, of spiritual disarrangement, overtook her, that was only symbolized to her by her tumbled head-dress. There was a feeling of having broken in upon and destroyed some perfect thing. At this moment she first felt any love for the convent. It received respect now that it

was no longer her gaoler. To the edifice itself she felt an attachment. She turned her head involuntarily and looked at the unchanging face of the stone walls through the trees. They seemed almost homelike. She did not know how long she was standing there in the road. But at last she returned to her companion; and as she came up, she looked into his eyes with a very solemn face. "You see what you have done," she said.

"I see it," he replied.

"You take me with many duties on me," she continued; "I owe very much to my life for having changed it."

"No more than you ever did; and that is, to act out the womanhood that is in you."

She smiled. "No one, nothing, can take away one's intention of good-will," she said. There was a look of triumph on her face. But in a few moments it became clouded again. "Dear Sister Ambrosia!"

They were silent awhile; then he asked, "Where are you going now?"

"Home," she said.

Uncle Luther met them at the door. He looked curiously at Marsy for a moment, with his beard and gashes, scarcely recognizing him; and then at Frances' bare head. In a moment more, he held his hand out, as if he had thought there was something at his side on which he could support himself. She stepped forward and took the hand, and he leaned on her. He

had grown old in the last year; his face was not so ruddy; it was somewhat pinched and wrinkled. The tears stood on his cheeks. He held his hand out to Marsy.

"Come in, come in, my children," he said, as his voice trembled; and as they went along the hall, he muttered fervently, "God bless you!"

THE END.

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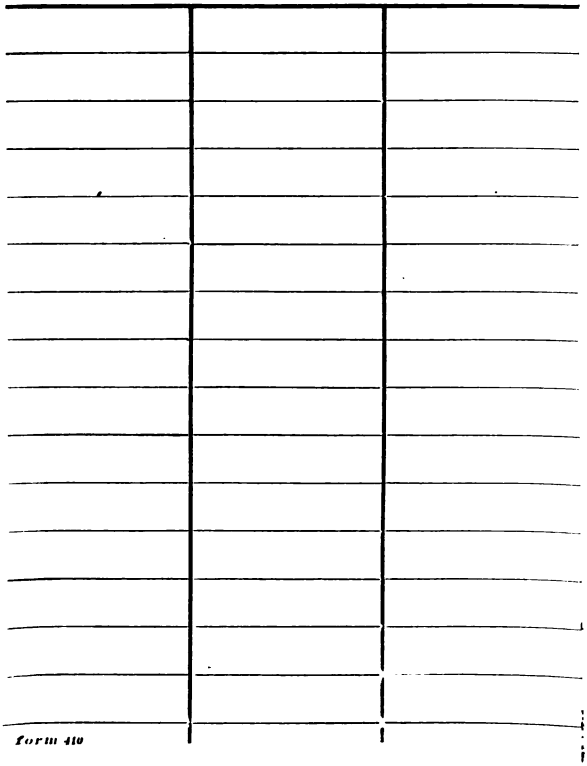
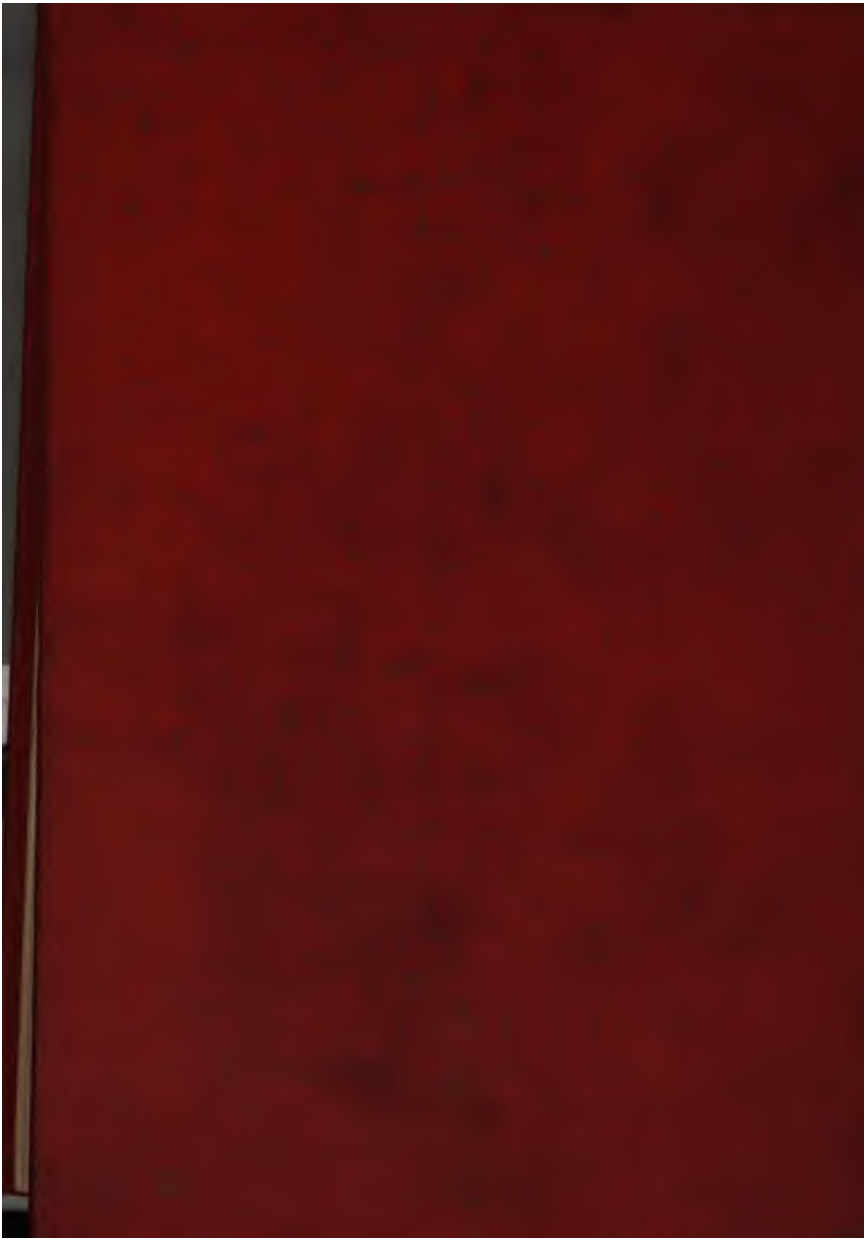
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